

CMS-EPSC Annual Meeting

Notes of a meeting held on 17 February 2012
at De Morgan House, 57-58 Russell Square, London WC1

Present: CMS

Anne Bennett (AB) (Secretariat)
Ken Brown (KB) (LMS Vice-President)
Roger Forder (RF) (ORS)
Paul Glendinning (PG) (IMA Vice-President)
Jeff Griffiths (JG) (ORS)
Valerie Isham (VI) (RSS President)
Frank Kelly (FK) (CMS Chair)
Kevin McConway (KM) (RSS Vice-President)
Robert MacKay (RM) (IMA President)
Fiona Nixon (FN) (LMS Executive Secretary)
Graeme Segal (GS) (LMS President)
Hetan Shah (HS) (RSS Executive Director)
David Youdan (DY) (IMA Executive Director)

EPSC

David Delpy (DD) (Chief Executive Officer)
Philippa Hemmings (PH) (Mathematical Sciences Theme Lead)
Claire Tansley (CT) (Mathematical Sciences Senior Manager)
Vivienne Blackstone (VB) (Mathematical Sciences Manager)
Maisie Wong (MW) (Mathematical Sciences Manager)

APOLOGIES

Prof Mark Chaplain (EMS President)
Mr Nick Cook (Mathematical Sciences Manager- EPSC)

1.0 Welcome and apologies

Frank Kelly began by welcoming everyone to the meeting. Apologies had been received from Penny Davies and Nick Cook.

2.0 Minutes of the last meeting held on 7 March 2011

The notes of the last meeting held on 7 March 2011 were approved.

3.0 Discussion Notes

3.1 EPSC Postdoctoral Fellowships

The two papers which had been circulated by way of background information were noted:

- CMS letter to EPSC dated 20 Dec 2011 (paper 3.1)
- EPSC reply to Frank Kelly dated 17 Jan 2012 (paper 3.1a)

CMS registered their continued disappointment that Post Doctoral Research Fellowships (PDRFs) are still only available in Statistics and Applied Probability. It was also noted that there is continued disquiet in the community about this.

EPSC and had no further comments to add beyond the letters already exchanged on this matter.

EPSC's move to allow 'Intradisciplinary' applications for Early Career fellowships was accepted. The CMS suggested that this should also be extended to PDRFs, and that

this would be welcomed by them.

EPSRC said that it had taken its decision based on the interpretation of advice given at the SAT meeting last October. However, CMS observers at that meeting reported that SAT members had asked for PDRFs to be opened up without restriction. EPSRC clarified that this had indeed been the SAT's preferred option but that a range of options had been discussed, recognising that not all fitted equally well with the new EPSRC framework.

EPSRC agreed that if it were possible to publish SAT minutes in full in future this would be helpful.

The CMS Chair commented that the data used by the House of Lords Science and Technology select committee on 29 November 2011 was different to that used by the CMS. The EPSRC said that the data it had provided to the House of Lords had subsequently been revised.

The CMS queried why fellowships could not be selected on 'quality' grounds only, independent of the research area. Professor Delpy reminded CMS that Council had decided that fellowships should be supported in the context of a strategic landscape for the future of the UK. Professor Isham noted that statistics departments have been putting clear effort into encouraging more people to apply for fellowships and that they expect there is to be a lot more applications this year for fellowships compared to the past. However, career paths in statistics meant that there is less demand for fellowships. EPSRC informed CMS of an additional measure that had been taken to support postdoctoral fellowships in statistics, namely to ask the three Science & Innovation awards to apply for further fellowship funding.

EPSRC reminded the CMS that the changes to the EPSRC Doctoral Prize made support available in a way that had some similarities to postdoctoral fellowships. The Doctoral Prize encourages individuals to develop an independent research career, and also allows institutions to identify and choose how to provide individuals with such support. The CMS expressed the view that the Doctoral Prize was not an adequate replacement for the PDRF scheme and that in previous years there have not been more than 1 to 2 applications in statistics. It was not reasonable to expect 10 applicants to come forward in statistics in the coming year. The CMS said that whilst appreciating the comments about flexibility, in some universities the money was not being made accessible to mathematicians.

The CMS noted that the existence and purpose of the EPSRC Doctoral prize was not universally well understood. It was also not clear how widely the changes had been disseminated. EPSRC summarised how the changes had been announced, both to mathematics departments (a letter to department heads, and on visits) and more generally (letter to pro-VCs). In all cases, it had been emphasized that universities had considerable flexibility in how to use the funding. It was agreed that it was important to continue to emphasize this and monitor uptake and use of the Doctoral Prize. CMS suggested that more publicity is needed. VB agreed to send the web link to information on the Doctoral Prize and Paul Glendinning would send around the letter to Heads of Department.

VPG/
PG

In summing up this discussion, the CMS Chair said that there would be 30% less on PDRFs and that money could go to doctoral prizes anywhere.

EPSRC noted that overall funding for fellowships had been broadly maintained but there is not a pre-determined distribution between different career stages.

3.2 Update on EPSRC Strategy

3.2.1 Shaping Capability and Developing Leaders

EPSRC gave a summary of their current position. This included the extra engagement

with the learned societies and nominees from CMS and Institute of Physics. In the case of Mathematical Sciences, the next decisions will be announced at the end of March 2012 along with all outstanding decisions across the EPSRC portfolio.

CMS noted that some fellows are being invited to apply for extensions and questioned how this fits with the Developing Leaders strategy and how these applications were being peer reviewed. There are concerns that this is not an open call and applications are not being tensioned against other requests for fellowships support. EPSRC noted that the strategic plan described the intention to provide longer period of support for fellows and the process was similar to that used by the Royal Society. CMS felt that this was part of a policy to increase the concentration of research funding.

3.2.2 Overall Strategy for the mathematical sciences

RM noted EPSRC's request for him to comment on EPSRC strategy via completion of a questionnaire and that the deadline imposed meant he recognised that a major change to the current taxonomy was not feasible. He suggested however, that this should be pursued in the coming months given the weaknesses of the current taxonomy e.g. the absence of mathematical biology, and the need for clarification of the status of Complexity Science as a cross-programme research area for EPSRC, not just for Mathematical Sciences. John Ball for example had suggested that EPSRC should base the taxonomy on the American Mathematical Society MSC groupings, referees and applicants could be asked to use MSC codes to facilitate peer review process and classification of grants.

KM noted that the multiple uses of taxonomy in maths make changes challenging e.g. some areas of maths go across multiple areas. He suggested that it would be helpful, in some cases, to have a common taxonomy across RCUK but in other cases this would not be appropriate.

EPSRC noted that there are differences in how to apply taxonomy between themes and practical problems. Changes in taxonomy affect BIS and reporting historical funding. It was also noted that the operation of RCUK Shared Services Centre poses certain limitations as to how information can be managed.

RM said that the meeting which EPSRC had convened on 3rd February 2012 had been very useful. Meeting notes have been written with a view that they would be shared once agreed with attendees. It was also noted that Paul Nurse's Royal Society address has been discussed with ELT and circulated to EPSRC Council.

The EPSRC has extensively discussed future budgets with Pro Vice Chancellors. Overall, the budget is down 12-15% in real terms over the spending review period and the capital budget had been cut by 50%. Due to the requirement to manage expenditure on an annual basis to meet Treasury targets it is necessary to make a large number of commitments early in the spending review, although grant commitments result in expenditure over a number of years. EPSRC's major commitment will be in 2012/13 and then reduce significantly in 2013/14 which will be challenging to manage. EPSRC are ensuring that the community are aware of this. EPSRC's 2014/15 commitment will be at higher levels than 2013/14. Although new commitments would be variable it should be noted that annual expenditure will be broadly stable. In particular support for new students is planned to be stable.

Doctoral Training Grants

The EPSRC explained that a new approach was being developed for the future allocation of the Doctoral Training Grant (DTG). The new process would be developed in the next few months to allow adequate notice regarding the inputs required, and for these to be assessed and decisions announced by early 2013. VB noted the Mathematical Sciences theme currently had a different approach to the rest of EPSRC for allocating their DTG budget and that the last Mathematical Sciences peer review panel regarding DTGs took place in 2009. The Mathematical Sciences will pilot a new

DTG process for students starting in 2013 and 2014. The intention is that by 2015 Mathematical Sciences will be an integrated part of the general EPSRC DTG allocation process. This is likely to involve allocating longer DTGs, with greater interaction between universities and EPSRC. The aim is to ask universities to submit bids which will be assessed against a number of strategic criteria.

3.3 Implementing the IRMS Action Plan

EPSRC gave an update on the International Review of Mathematical Sciences 2010 (IRMS) action plan. A draft response was published at the beginning of December and comments were invited. The EPSRC had 6 responses, a number of which were collective e.g. CMS. EPSRC have been considering these. Points of significance were concerns around the lack of a separate peer review panel for statistics and operational research and concerns about communication with EPSRC.

CMS noted that another point of major concern is the distributed geographical excellence for health of research and future teaching capability. CMS noted that EPSRC's actions lead to concentrating resources rather than supporting diversity.

Regarding communication, CMS queried if it is possible to receive updates directly from EPSRC rather than having communication only via the EPSRC website. EPSRC noted that there is to be a balance between having formal discussions and agreeing what was said, then publishing, compared to informal discussions and agreeing key points. However, EPSRC agreed that further thought was needed as to how communications could be as effective as possible.

It was noted that the RSS supports EPSRC's decision to grow statistics but feels that the community needs to be involved in deciding the most appropriate way to do this. It was noted that a strong base of statistical researchers is required to work with people from other disciplines, it was not just about teaching.

EPSRC noted that its remit is research excellence and national capability rather than geographical distribution and though there is dialogue with HEFCE, it is a shared responsibility between HEFCE and universities.

Following IRMS Recommendation 5, CMS queried if EPSRC would consider reinstating funding for masters. EPSRC noted that this is not possible; this position was common across all Research Councils. The gap in UK support was recognised and there have been round-table discussion on this. CMS noted that they have been talking to HEFCE about Masters funding, in particular in relation to those student cohorts who will paying higher fees.

3.4 EPSRC Engagement with the Mathematical Sciences Community

3.4.1 Strategic Advisory Team

CMS thanked EPSRC for the invitation to put forward nominations for new SAT members and for the invitation for CMS observers to attend the next SAT meeting. Ken Brown and Penny Davis will attend on behalf of the CMS. EPSRC also wrote to Heads of Departments and the Smith Institute (Mathematics KTN) inviting nominations.

EPSRC noted that one way to improve communication is for CMS to be more engaged with the SAT. A view across EPSRC has not yet been formed regarding what the steady-state situation will be. Beyond the EPSRC's period of Shaping Capability, discussions are still ongoing about the role of learned societies with SATs. DD noted that the role and membership of SATs will be discussed at Council later this year. Any change will be applicable across breadth of EPSRC.

CMS asked if it is possible to have CMS observers at the SAT as a regular occurrence; however, the EPSRC said that the SAT needed to be able to feel unencumbered in providing advice, especially on some matters where there could be a difference of

opinion with learned societies. EPSRC also reminded CMS that SAT members were there as individuals (not representatives of a particular part of the community). It was agreed, especially in light of the concerns expressed on EPSRC communication with the community, that it could be useful for EPSRC to provide the SAT or individual members with more support to help sound out the community. CMS suggested that EPSRC should provide SAT members with a more complete agenda earlier and also suggested that EPSRC could provide guidelines for SAT members to engage with the community. VI suggested that EPSRC make available to the community information about key SAT discussions in advance so they could contact SAT members before meeting. EPSRC said that they would release what they can on SAT meetings to the CMS.

3.4.2 Pure Mathematics Workshop

The CMS noted that many of the attendees did not feel that the workshop was a success with part of the problem being a lack of trust. In particular, it had not been helpful that only very limited information had been sent out in advance. However, the idea of the workshop was welcomed and the CMS hoped that there would be other opportunities in the future. The CMS encouraged EPSRC to ask for greater input from attendees ahead of the event.

EPSRC noted that the workshop report has now been sent to attendees and that EPSRC would encourage discussion of the report. The workshop was organised at relatively short notice which led to not being able to inform attendees of details in advance. EPSRC have learnt a lot and the feedback has been taken seriously and reflected in the report to ensure a balanced account. In future, the EPSRC will aim to make sure a broader section of the community has the opportunity to feed into such events.

3.5 CMS- EPSRC Study on the Economic Impact of the Mathematical Sciences

EPSRC gave an update on the economic study to be carried out in 2012, the main objective of which was to provide input to the next spending review. This is being overseen by a steering committee whose members include Robert Leese, Philippa Hemmings, Anne Bennett, John Toland and David Youdan.

The study is currently out to tender. The project manager is a DSTL secondee supported by the EPSRC Evidence & Evaluation Group. The estimated cost of the contract is of the order of £60,000.

EPSRC noted that the need for something more wide ranging than individual case studies and evidence was required on the economic impact of the fundamental core of mathematical science. EPSRC were asking contractors to be both creative in the possible approaches and realistic as to its limitations to ensure that the final report was credible. EPSRC also noted that the study is not restricted to research impacts and would also try to take into account the "people pipeline".

CMS suggested that a scientific advisory board is set up to advise the steering committee and contractor; PH suggested we should wait to see what the contractor proposed to do and what support or input was required from the research community.

4.0 Questions

No further questions.

5.0 Future actions

An agreed action list with a short note of actions should be sent out soon after each meeting.

VB

CMS asked what further interactions were envisaged after the remaining decisions on

Shaping has been published. EPSRC stated that a communication and engagement plan had been drawn up including, for example, a number of open meetings. The EPSRC Communications team are continuing to work on this. However, the focus after March would be more on implementation of the strategic decisions. PH said that EPSRC will aim to draw actions to the attention of key stakeholders ahead of publication, including CMS.

PH

CMS asked about the implementation of shaping capability actions. DD noted that a sub-group of council has been looking at what sort of changes to peer review could be needed but that no changes would take effect before October and will be announced in early April. Council will discuss the options recommended by the subgroup in March.

6.0 Any Other Business

None on this occasion.

7.0 Date of next meeting

CMS-EPSRC Liaison meetings in 2012: To be confirmed.

[Secretary's note: The next CMS-EPSRC Liaison meeting will take place on 25 September 2012]

MINUTE	ACTION	OWNER
3.1	Philippa Hemmings to raise the issue of publishing SAT minutes with EPSRC.	Philippa Hemmings
3.1	Vivienne Blackstone to send web link of doctoral prize to Paul Glendinning to send around HoDMS.	Vivienne Blackstone/ Paul Glendinning
5.0	An agreed action list with a short note of actions should be sent out soon after each meeting	Anne Bennett