

International Biometric Society — British and Irish Region

Secretary's report, November 2008

James Carpenter

This year has been excellent for the BIR: hosting a superb international conference in Dublin; three stimulating scientific meetings, and 44 new members.

The success of the international conference in Dublin, with over 900 participants, owes much to the tireless work of Andrew Mead and we are very grateful for his enthusiasm and energy. Thanks are also due to other BIR members who worked to make the meeting a success. On the local organising committee, John Hinde (chair), Gabrielle Kelly, Adele Marshall, Patrick Murphy, John Whittaker and Angela Wood. On the scientific committee, David Balding and Andrew Mead. Abstracts and reports from the meeting can be found on the IBS website (www.tibs.org) and some informal feedback on the meeting is in our regional newsletter (see <http://www.britishandirish.tibs.org/live/>). Once again we thank the Fisher Memorial Trust for their support of the bursary scheme, from which 11 BIR members benefited.

We have held three scientific meetings this year (including this afternoon's): Dosing and formulation studies (organised by Steve Gilmour; joint with RSS general applications section); Issues & models for competing risks studies (organised by Bianca DeStavola; joint with RSS medical section) and Recent developments in genetic epidemiology (organised by David Balding, joint with the South of England Genetic Epidemiology Group). While all were joint meetings, the committee members concerned took the lead in all cases which often involved a non-trivial amount of work. Thanks are due to them. Full details of the meetings are reported in the regional newsletter. Plans for next year's scientific meetings are in hand, and details will follow in the December newsletter. Following the decision at last year's AGM that meetings should break even over the course of the year, I'm pleased that there is a small surplus from this year's meetings.

We are also pleased that, not least because of the IBC Dublin, we have had 44 new members join including a number of students. One of the on-going concerns has been the decline in membership, and the committee has devoted a considerable amount of time drawing together various ideas to help attract and retain members. These include:

1. A re-vamp of the regional newsletter. This is the main point of contact with members, and the more interesting and relevant it is the better. The new format has been well received (the newsletter was the most popular take-away item from the IBS stand at the Dublin conference), but we are still looking for more people to send in material and/or write short articles.
2. Continued lobbying at the international level for the option of 'membership with electronic only access to Biometrics and/or JABES'—with a corresponding reduced subscription. The committee believes this makes sense in an era when many only access the journal online through their institutions. We have made progress in this area, but this is still not resolved.
3. A new regional website. The current website has served us well, but is now insufficiently flexible. Further, it is hard to keep content up-to-date. Peter Colman, Robin Thompson and James Carpenter are drawing up a specification for a new site, which the committee proposes will be professionally designed. In the interim, a revamped version of the current site will be launched today.
4. Ensuring the scientific meetings make a small annual surplus, and thus avoiding as far as possible using members subscriptions to subsidise meetings. This is because many meeting attendees are nonmembers, and because we feel it is often possible to reclaim meeting fees, e.g. from a grant, whereas subscriptions often come from members' own pockets.
5. Setting up an informal internet network for student members, where they can keep in touch.

We are particularly fortunate that we have reasonable reserves, so we can invest in some of these initiatives. Nevertheless, before doing so the committee will be careful to look for good value for money.

I, and the committee, are always keen to hear from members about what they would like the society to be doing (or what it is doing now that it shouldn't be doing): do feel free to email me (james.carpenter@lshtm.ac.uk). We are working to make the BIR relevant and attractive, because we believe it has an important role to play in bringing together statisticians working in environmental, agricultural, biological and medical applications—but we need your input, and help in encouraging new members to take up and retain membership.

Finally, it is a pleasure to thank David for his leadership of the region over the last two years: I have greatly enjoyed working with him. We look forward to his Presidential Address this afternoon. It is also a pleasure to welcome Byron Morgan as the incoming regional president. Byron has been involved with the IBS for many years and is a past president of the international society (1996–97). His commitment and wisdom will be very welcome.