

President's Message – April 2019

Reporting to members – from four meetings in four countries.

Over the past six weeks I have participated in four meetings in four countries – three were ISI and the fourth, although not ISI, touched on matters of importance to ISI and its Associations.

In her March message, the ISI Director reported on ISI's participation in the 50th meeting of the United Nations Statistical Commission (UNSC) on 3-8 March in New York. This was my second UNSC and, although ISI is only an observer, I saw that ISI holds a special place within the global scope of UNSC; my ongoing chairing of the challenging GIST (Global Network of Institutions for Statistical Training) is just a very minor example of many. ISI's side event, on 'Preparation and Skilling for Official Statistics Careers' was a significant success in both attendance and participation, especially considering that it was held early morning on the coldest day that week, with -9 degrees centigrade plus considerable wind chill. Participant feedback requested that this topic be further pursued by an event with more time for both presentations and discussion, and it is proposed to try to hold an ISI side event or special session on this topic at the next UN World Data Forum (WDF).



Such a plan is part of the mutual aims of ISI and UNSD (UN Statistical Division) to increase interaction and connections between the long-established and globally renowned WSC and the youthful but UNSD-organised WDF. One excellent outcome of collaborative discussion is the WSC 2019 satellite Symposium on Data Science and Official Statistics, organised by members of the United Nations Global Working Group (GWG) on Big Data for Official Statistics (see unstats.un.org/bigdata), to be held in Kuala Lumpur 15 – 17 August.

Which jumps me to the last of the four meetings, the WSC 2019 preparation meeting held in Kuala Lumpur last week, in which the ISI Director, Associate Director and I met with all the relevant organizers for WSC 2019. The unique character and experience of each WSC are shaped not only by country and region, but also by scientific program, venue, venue location and cultural program. I have commented before on the care in preparation and organisation of the KL WSC 2019 teams, and again the thought and care which is being put into the preparation for WSC 2019 are impressive. ISI WSC 2019 is only the second WSC in South East Asia, with the first one being the 42nd ISI WSC, forty years ago in Manila. Last week we had the opportunity to meet the major sponsors of WSC 2019, all of whom are leading in technical development in the powerhouse which is Asia.

The scientific program promises much in both diversity, excellence and interaction across the statistical and data sciences, with speakers from 103 countries. This program is remarkably enriched by the excellent and exciting satellites associated with WSC 2019. The WSC Special Invited Paper Sessions have recently been put on the website, with an impressive list of speakers and topics. The President's Invited Keynote Speaker's topic of "Enhancing Data Science Ethics through Statistical Education Practice" reflects cutting edge interests across

the global statistical community. The topics and speakers of the Invited Paper Sessions (IPS) are as diverse as engaging, with 131 sessions, 480 speakers and 73 discussants. The success rate of 56% for IPS demonstrate the competition and quality of these sessions. The Special Topic Sessions (STS) were almost as competitive, with a 61% success rate. The 106 STS, with 379 speakers and 52 discussants also range over a diversity of statistical and data science topics. The 703 contributed papers, with 292 oral and 381 e-poster presentations, demonstrate the importance of this WSC across statistical topics, and across ages and regions of participants.

The second meeting (in yet another country) was a non-ISI publishing and editorial meeting but on topics of immediate and long-term importance to ISI, namely the open access movement in publishing, and the development and teaching of data science curricula. Many of our members are, or will be, involved in aspects of these, and I call on members to share thoughts, experiences and opinions on these topics.

The third group of my meetings was the ISI Executive Committee (EC) meeting in The Hague. The EC is able to meet in person only three times a year, and these are intensive meetings ranging over all the practical details, strategic, short-term and long-term planning for a highly diverse and scattered global professional association with many responsibilities and expectations worldwide. In between these meetings the EC is in constant email communication and holds calls as frequently as possible given the time zones range from 6am to 10pm.

One EC agenda item was a first look at the survey of ISI and Association members conducted in late 2018. This survey linked with the first survey of 2016 and ISI's strategy (which in itself drew from the survey of members). The EC thanks the 383 ISI and Association members who responded so thoughtfully. The responses will be analyzed and reported, but here are just a few titbits of preliminary information. It was pleasing to see that at least 40% of respondents were under 50 years of age and 32% were regular member. 51% of respondents were elected members and 16 % were Association only, but there were 401 Association memberships reported; even allowing for multiple Association memberships, this was just one indication of significant engagement in the ISI family by the respondents.

I refer above to the diverse responsibilities and expectations worldwide of ISI and its Associations, and just one of the ongoing objectives of the EC is to significantly increase membership to better enable ISI to meet its aims, objectives, strategic aspirations and the global expectations of it. The EC calls on all members to help - a target of 1000 new members may seem ambitious but with everybody's help and ISI's standing it is surely achievable worldwide.

Helen MacGillivray
ISI President