President's Message – June 2019

Community, history and conferences

My comments for this month arise from a visit to Moscow two weeks ago, preparing to write a report on the recent survey of ISI and Association members, and preparation for the 62\textsuperscript{nd} occurrence of the international phenomenon that is the ISI World Statistics Congress.

My invited visit to Moscow as ISI President, 26\textsuperscript{th}-30\textsuperscript{th} May, was organised and funded by the Plekhanov Russian University of Economics, the Analytical Centre of Moscow City Government, the Russian Association of Statisticians, the National Research University Higher School of Economics, and the Moscow Department of Economic Policy and Development. The visit consisted of: a Symposium at the Russian House of Scientists, with representatives from universities and statistical organisations; meetings with the Directors and representatives of Rosstat and the Analytical Centre of Moscow City Government; and a meeting with the Moscow Deputy Mayor and representatives of the Moscow Department of Economic Policy and Development.

Questions and discussion ranged widely over topics common across the global statistical community:

- how to teach and assess statistics at school and university level to develop statistical thinking, problem-solving and to reflect the practice of statistics;
- how to cooperate with other countries on SDG indicators, monitoring and training;
- how to best combine statistics and IT at university and in professional development courses;
- student-owned learning and investigations.

The request for my presentation was to describe ISI’s mission and roles in global development of statistics, and best practice and international cooperation in teaching statistics. Because I was informed that this was the first visit by a serving ISI President to Russia since 1897 (when the first ISI President, Sir Rawson W. Rawson, attended the 6\textsuperscript{th} WSC in St Petersburg), my interest in delving into more history was piqued. 

“A history of the ISI 1885-1960”, by J.W. Nixon is an extraordinarily detailed but fascinating read of eras 60-135 years ago.

The Bernoulli Society (BS) has a very interesting history at [www.bernoulli-society.org](http://www.bernoulli-society.org), as do a number of excellent IASE articles at [iase-web.org](http://iase-web.org) which are recommended for all ISI readers. TIES and ISBIS give brief histories and I was able to find a little more history background for ISBIS and IASC. It is of interest to note that the BS’s International Conference on Stochastic Processes and Applications, held 40 times since 1971, was held for the first time in Russia in 2017.
Vice-president Peter Guttorp has revitalised ISI’s Committee on the History of Statistics. This is important work, and members interested in contributing to this committee are welcome.

I outlined how ISI had been pivotal in developing, connecting and reaching out, adapting to changing world conditions – most notably after World War II, when it became completely a professional society, unique in its reach across the world and statistics. How BS, ISBIS, IASC and IASE developed provided excellent examples of foresight and initiative. On statistical education, I spoke on challenges and opportunities, including discussing how data science can be used to reinforce and update long-time advocacy from professional statisticians and leading statistical educators.

There was high interest in ISI and Associations at all meetings: across all conferences including WSC’s, RSC’s (Regional Statistics Conferences); Special Interest Groups; Outreach; and ISI’s Memoranda of Understanding and links with a number of organisations, particularly the Irving Fisher Committee and the International Association of Research in Income and Wealth.

In late 2018, we conducted a second members’ survey, of ISI and Associations, and plan to do this biennially. The second survey built on the first, with fewer open-ended questions. In working on a report (available in July) of the 2018 survey, again what stands out are members’ views on the importance of the ISI family as a truly professional society, spanning the world and statistics, and promoting international excellence and cooperation.

One of the open-ended questions which we will always use is “What do you like most about participating as a member of the ISI family?” Below are the word clouds of responses to this question in 2016 and 2018.

From 2016 survey

From 2018 survey

The World Statistics Congresses and their associated satellites and meetings are the highlight of conferencing for the global statistical community. As preparations intensify for the 62nd WSC in Kuala Lumpur in August, it is relevant to emphasize that “world, conferences, meetings and networking” again stand out as what members like most. The 62nd WSC, the tenth to be held in the whole of Asia, has an amazing array of sessions, papers, associated
satellites, symposia and meetings, illustrating both the diversity and concord of the global statistical community. We cannot do much about political and cultural divisions around the world, but we can demonstrate, as ISI has done across its history, the importance of worldwide statistical development and cooperation. We look forward to meeting as many members as possible at the 62nd WSC.

Helen MacGillivray
ISI President