



Report on the SSAI Workshop on Integrating Statistical Ideas into Mathematics

**Held on 25 July 2007
Macquarie University**

5 September 2007

Organised by:
NSW Branch,
Statistical Society of Australia

*Report prepared by:
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Table of Contents

Executive Summary	3
Introduction.....	4
Program.....	4
Who Attended	5
Speaker session	6
David Steel.....	6
Peter Osland and Margaret Bigelow	6
Rosemary Callingham.....	7
Chris Reading.....	7
Narelle Smith	8
Eric Sowe.....	8
Breakout session	9
Suggestions for future interaction and support	9
Educating students about the opportunities	10
Mathematics Teacher Qualifications	10
Professional Development for high school teachers in statistical methodology.....	10
Statistical Content of School Mathematics Syllabi.....	10
Cross-Departmental collaboration	10
Communication.....	11
Appendix 1 – Speaker Presentations.....	12
Appendix 2 – Detailed Breakout Session Comments	13

Executive Summary

This half-day workshop was organised by the NSW Branch of the Statistical Society of Australia and held at Macquarie University on 25 July 2007. Its aim was to bring together those involved with and interested in the development of the statistical components of the secondary school mathematics syllabi to discuss issues involved in educating high school students in (i) statistical thinking skills, in general, and (ii) some foundations for the kinds of formal courses in statistics that are nowadays required in many university degree programmes. The number and calibre of the speakers and attendees signal the strong interest there is among educators in tackling the challenges of providing statistical education at the appropriate level to the appropriate students at the appropriate time.

Fifty-two people attended the workshop (eight of them as speakers and Chair). Another four expressed a strong interest but were unable to attend. Attendees came from private and state schools, TAFE colleges, universities, policy type organisations such as the Board of Studies and other organisations.

Speakers covered a range of topics including reporting on the the recommendations from two recent reports produced on statistics and education in universities and secondary schools, viz *Statistics at Australian Universities: An SSAI-sponsored Review*, December 2005 and *Mathematics and Statistics: Critical Skills for Australia's Future*, The National Strategic Review of Mathematical Sciences Research in Australia, December 2006; the new Stage 6 Mathematics syllabi due to be rolled out in NSW schools in 2010; the Stat Smart ARC linkage project; the Schools Statistics Poster Competition; teaching statistics to other disciplines at university and ideas on how to make mathematics and statistics components coherent in the secondary schools mathematics syllabus.

Some of the suggestions and possible future links from the day include:

- Improving the clarity around qualifications required for Mathematics teachers. The Statistical Society of Australia could work with NSW Institute of Teachers to share information on the value of accredited statistics courses and their contribution to mathematical teacher education
- Improved support for Mathematics teachers in delivering the statistical components of the syllabus. Universities may be able to work more closely with the schools in their footprint to provide in-service courses to support teachers. Universities may also be able to provide more support to schools in regards to the variety of careers that require statistical skills. The MANSW may also be able to help in this area.
- Increasing the involvement of university educators interested in statistical education in the development of the school mathematics syllabi. Individual universities may liaise directly with the Board of Studies and possibly the SSAI will continue to have these types of forums to encourage communication.

Introduction

This half-day workshop was organised by the NSW Branch of the Statistical Society of Australia and held at Macquarie University on 25 July 2007. Its aim was to bring together those involved with and interested in the development of the statistical components of the secondary school mathematics syllabi to discuss issues involved in educating high school students in (i) statistical thinking skills, in general, and (ii) some foundations for the kinds of formal courses in statistics that are nowadays required in many university degree programmes. The number and calibre of the speakers and attendees signal the strong interest there is among educators in tackling the challenges of providing statistical education at the appropriate level to the appropriate students at the appropriate time.

Program

The workshop commenced at 1pm with a light lunch. Presentations are provided in Appendix 1.

David Steel from the University of Wollongong was the first speaker. David discussed the findings and presented the recommendations from two recent reports produced on statistics and education in universities and secondary schools.

- *Statistics at Australian Universities: An SSAI-sponsored Review. December 2005*
- *Mathematics and Statistics: Critical Skills for Australia's Future. The National Strategic Review of Mathematical Sciences Research in Australia. December 2006*

Margaret Bigelow and Peter Osland from the NSW Board of Studies followed, with an update on the current status and proposed statistics content of the new Stage 6 Mathematics syllabi due to be rolled out in 2010.

The next part of the afternoon was focussed on some activities that are currently underway to assist the teaching of statistics.

Rosemary Callingham, School of Education at the University of New England talked about a research initiative, Stat Smart, she is involved in through an ARC linkage project. This project aims to track changes in teachers and their students over time while using state-of-the-art software, Tinkerplots and Fathom, and real data from CensusAtSchool.

Chris Reading, SiMERR (National Centre of Science, Information and Communication Technology and Mathematics Education for Rural and Regional Australia), University of New England presented on the Schools Statistics Poster Competition.

Narelle Smith from the University of Technology Sydney shared her experiences and challenges in teaching statistics to other disciplines.

The final speaker before the break-out session was Eric Sowe, University of NSW. Eric shared some of his ideas on how to make mathematics and statistics components coherent in the secondary school mathematics syllabus

The aim of the breakout session was to allow attendees to share their experiences and challenges in the teaching of statistics, discuss what worked and what didn't, think of how the collaboration between the secondary schools and universities might be continued and so on. A summary of the breakout session is provided at the end of this Report.

The workshop was to finish at 5:30 pm but continued to 5:45 pm as a result of the continued discussions. The workshop was followed by drinks and dinner at a local hotel for those who wished to stay on.

Who Attended

Fifty-two people attended the workshop (seven of them as speakers and me as Chair). Another four expressed a strong interest but were unable to attend. These four have been included on the email list for distribution of material after the workshop.

Attendees came from a range of institutions, as shown below. Those attending from universities were from the disciplines of statistics and education.

Attendees:

Policy Type Organisations

MANSW	2	Curriculum K-12 Directorate	1
Catholic Schools Office	1	Board of Studies	2

Private Schools

Moriah War Memorial College	1	International Grammar School	1
St Mary's Cathedral College	1	Ascham School	2
Catherine McAuley	2	Kings School	1
Pymble Ladies College	2		
MLC School	1		

State Schools and TAFE colleges

Burwood	1	Dapto	2
Wiley Park Girls	1	Epping Boys	1
Bankstown TAFE	1	Conservatorium of Music	1

Universities

University of Sydney	3	Macquarie University	2
University of Technology	3	University of Newcastle	2
University of Wollongong	1	Australian Catholic University	1
Charles Sturt University	1	University of Western Sydney	3

Other

Australian Bureau of Statistics	1	Unknown institutions (assumed schools)	3
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Speakers:

University of New England	2
University of NSW	1
Board of Studies	2
University of Technology	1
University of Wollongong	1

Those unable to attend included people from:

Curriculum Pedagogy Assessment Moderation Planning, Success for Boys
Killara High School
University of Queensland
Moriah Memorial College

Speaker session

David Steel

David raised the issue that, while there is a drift of high school and university students from mathematics, science and engineering, the numbers of Honours and PhD students remains constant. At the same time there is increased demand and opportunities for Statistics graduates in the Australian Bureau of Statistics, and the fields of finance, bioinformatics, biostatistics, security, climate change, and so on.

He raised the nagging question: how do we get the message through to students about these opportunities?

David also discussed who was responsible for teaching mathematics and statistics at university and stressed the need for training and support and interaction with primary and secondary teachers.

An unexpected issue came from the audience. How much mathematics and statistics should a mathematics teacher have? There was no consensus as to what the qualification requirements were within the public education sector and there was confusion as to whether teachers who had completed mainly statistics courses during their degree studies were eligible for promotion to Head Teacher in NSW high schools. There was also the comment that requiring a major in pure mathematics is scaring potential mathematics teachers away from the profession.

Peter Osland and Margaret Bigelow

Peter presented the timelines being followed in developing the Stage 6 mathematics syllabus before implementing into Year 11 in 2010. The development of the Writing Briefs is almost at an end, and is due to be completed in August 2007. Following completion of the Writing Briefs, a crucial time will begin for the members of this workshop, as the syllabus is developed over the period September 2007 to November 2008.

Peter also talked about how the Board of Studies goes about obtaining information and ideas to contribute to the new syllabus. For example, written and oral submissions, surveys, literature reviews, expert advisory panels and so on.

Margaret went on to provide an overview of what statistics topics there are currently in the mathematics syllabus and what changes are proposed. See the slides for details. Margaret continued to stress that these were, so far, only proposals and that she and Peter were present to take any feedback with them back to the development team.

A number of concerns were raised by the audience. They fell into two broad categories.

The first category related to professional development support for all teachers, in particular for those who have no formal statistics training. There was agreement that there are a large number of teachers in the profession who are extremely concerned as to their ability to implement the statistical components of any syllabus.

The second category focussed on the actual content of each course, how it relates to each other course and how teachers are to find the time to teach the topics appropriately. Questions were also asked about what software packages were available to help teach statistics and what were good sources of data for examples, as it was felt that many of the examples and exercises currently in use were not authentic enough. Comments were made that statistics and statistical thinking would benefit by cross-departmental collaboration – in particular, with English, Science and Information Technology.

Rosemary Callingham

Rosemary talked about the research available on children's ability to understand statistical concepts. She believes the curriculum documents are not matched to the research base and encouraged everyone to take these research findings into consideration when developing new syllabi.

The Stat Smart ARC linkage project she discussed is due to be completed in 2010, the same year the new syllabus is due to be implemented in NSW. The industry partners in this project include the Australian Bureau of Statistics, Key Curriculum Press (who have a very interesting software package for teaching statistics to school children) and Prince Alfred College. Fifty teachers in 16 schools across Victoria, Tasmania and South Australia are taking part in the programme. The aim is to consider the effects of using state of the art software, Tinkerplots and Fathom, real data from the CensusAtSchool database and research based approaches to teaching statistics.

Chris Reading

Chris talked about her experience with the National Schools Statistics Poster Competition in 2006. She provided some history of the competition, how it became national, the challenges she had in getting the message about the competition to the right people and the results of the competition in 2006. She also took the opportunity to advertise the 2007 competition. A number of teachers took the competition flyer, so it will be

interesting to see how many of them are able to provide students to participate. There was discussion around how teachers could fit this type of activity on top of their current workload and the possibility of it becoming part of their educational approach, using it as an assignment.

Narelle Smith

Narelle spoke about the challenges of providing statistical training across other disciplines at the university level. She explained that statistics was taught as a service subject within business, science, information technology, the humanities, nursing and so on. It is also taught as a subject within the mathematics school at the University of Technology. This is not always the case. In other universities statistics can be taught as part of the financial school.

Narelle talked about some interesting data sources, such as the Titanic passenger list and the First Fleet. She provided some examples of the type of questions she would pose.

Narelle went on to talk about some research she had undertaken with a colleague of hers, Leigh Wood, into graduate attributes published in IJMEST. They were interested in the skills required by mathematics graduates in the workplace. In-depth interviews with 18 graduates who were within five years of their graduation, with majors in the mathematical sciences, were undertaken. The major finding was that teaching was a common requirement in the workplace. This could be via seminars, discussions, instructing, general talking, negotiating and selling ideas to clients and explaining ideas. Teaching could be both oral and written and there was a need to modify the language depending on the audience. As a result of the research, Narelle now includes assessment items to reflect the students' ability to explain their work to a range of audiences. She provided examples of the assessment questions.

Members of the audience were very interested to know the different disciplines that required statistics education and to know of interesting data sources. A discussion was had around the difficulties of setting language type assessment questions for students where English is not their first language. Although it was acknowledged that these questions can be very difficult for some students, the reality is that they need these skills in the workforce. If they don't get them during their degree they will not be successful in obtaining a position in their field of expertise – a hard lesson to learn but better learnt sooner rather than later.

Eric Sowe

Eric spoke about his ideas for teaching statistics coherently within the NSW mathematics syllabi. His comments were based on an assumption that the content of the proposed Stage 6 syllabi were settled and he was very pleased to have heard from Margaret that they were still up for comment.

His first point was a need to clarify the distinction 'between statistical knowledge as a contribution to numeracy for everyone and statistical knowledge as a technical grounding

for the few, namely, professionals working in quantitative fields'. Although Margaret had mentioned earlier that the syllabi needed to educate both types of students, Eric felt that the proposed syllabi could make this distinction more clearly. Eric classified the two teaching goals as:

- Numeracy – a grasp of basic statistical ideas that can help make every student more numerate.
- Optimal decision-making under uncertainty.

Eric felt that teaching for the numeracy goal is currently begun appropriately in the Years 7 – 10 Mathematics syllabus but needs to continue into the senior syllabus.

Ideas on teaching to reach the second goal were his second and third points.

Eric's second point was to discuss how careful syllabus formulation and 'insightful teaching' can increase coherence of the statistical subject matter through successive years, as well as providing coherent links with other mathematical topics. He urged everyone to consider that there may be students who are drawn intellectually or affectively to statistics and that maybe they should be offered something more rewarding. This led to his third point, that of offering a Year 12 statistics course as an alternative to Mathematics Extension 1 or Extension 2.

Eric raised some interesting thoughts and ideas that were then further discussed in the breakout session.

Breakout session

The breakout session was planned to be reasonably unstructured. Members of each group were asked to share their experiences of the challenges they face with the teaching of statistics, what worked, what didn't and what their comments were on the various items that had been raised during the speaker session.

A complete description of the feedback from all groups is provided in Appendix 2. The major topics of discussion have been listed below.

- Need for resources – both data and teacher support
- Stress in syllabus documents that real datasets are used
- Need to challenge better students
- A separate statistics course at senior level was generally thought of as a good option but would still need statistics in General and Advanced courses

Suggestions for future interaction and support

The following suggestions have been collated from various comments made throughout the course of the workshop. They are not being put forward as formal recommendations, merely as possible avenues to follow to continue to build connections between mathematics teachers and statisticians.

Educating students about the opportunities

- One way of getting the message through is to continue to have workshops such as this one where school teachers can share the experiences of university lecturers.
- This format could possibly be expanded to include talks where statisticians and non-statisticians in various industries can share their experiences in their use of mathematics and statistics and mathematical and statistical thinking.
- This activity will need to be a joint effort between various school education organisations, in particular the MANSW in NSW and local high schools, universities and possibly the SSAI.

Mathematics Teacher Qualifications

- The SSAI is in the process of accrediting statistics courses at universities.
- The SSAI may be able to work with the body that determines the educational qualifications of mathematics teachers to determine which statistics courses are of a standard that is appropriate for mathematics teachers i.e. there is sufficient statistical rigour.

Professional Development for high school teachers in statistical methodology

- Statistics departments at universities may be able to make an active contribution to providing statistical training for high school teachers within their footprint, or even further afield. An example is the mathematics teacher training day offered by University of Wollongong.
- To offer this on a larger scale across the state this may need the various educational districts to collaborate with their local universities. Maybe MANSW can also help in this regard.
- Possible offering of a Post Graduate Diploma in Statistics Education

Statistical Content of School Mathematics Syllabi

- There are essentially two strands of statistical thinking required at schools. The first is that for good citizenship, i.e understanding some of the ideas of statistics in terms of summaries and variation. The second is a more detailed understanding in preparation for a variety of university courses.
- The challenge here is to get some input from university lecturers interested in statistical education to provide advice on the methodologies and how they can be integrated over the various syllabi.
- The SSAI will follow-up on possible arrangements that may assist both the training of secondary school teachers and input to the syllabi. The requirements will be tabled at the Central Council meeting of the SSAI held on 1 August 2007.

Cross-Departmental collaboration

- This was acknowledged as an excellent idea but it was recognised as being extremely difficult.

- The ability for this type of collaboration to take place probably resides within the various schools themselves and the interests of the teachers.
- With an understanding of the need for teaching in any workplace, including those in mathematical/ statistical professions the mathematics teachers may be in a better position to work with the English departments to share some of the challenges
- It may be that MANSW could provide some support.

Communication

- How can initiatives like the Schools Poster Competition be advertised in such a way that there is confidence the information is getting to the right people?
- How can information about the usefulness or otherwise of various tools, eg software be shared amongst mathematics teachers?
- How can sources of good data be shared amongst mathematics teachers?

MANSW may be able to help by putting the information and/or links on their webpage.

Appendix 1 – Speaker Presentations

Speaker	File name
David Steel	Some Recent Reports.pdf
Margaret Bigelow & Peter Osland	Stage 6 Mathematics Review & Development.ppt
Rosemary Callingham	Statistics in School.ppt
Chris Reading	SSPS.ppt
Narelle Smith	Statistical Education Tertiary.ppt
Eric Sowe	Eric Sowe – Handout at SSAI Workshop 25 July 2007.pdf Eric Sowe – Perspective over Quantitative Methods B.tif

Appendix 2 – Detailed Breakout Session Comments

Red Group

- Should there be a separate statistics course?
- Statistical tools arising from data sets is the way to go
- Models & fit: eg baby growth charts; should income distribution be normal? Why?
- May grow out of focus areas
- Enormous resources on the web
- Leads to cooperation with other subjects/ disciplines
- Maths teachers with no statistics background need a huge amount of support
- Much of the stats in General is now in Yr 9-10
- Need something between basics and inference
- More challenging stats for higher level courses. So General Maths has concepts of variability, Advanced have more demanding concepts, plus separate 60 hr stats course
- Stats needed in General and Advanced courses as not all students will do a separate stats course
- Eg do advanced, ext 1 and either ext 2 or stats
- Or advanced, ext 1 or advanced, stats
- In syllabus document point out that real data sets are used – makes it more interesting

- Technology
- Has impact. Eg graphics calculators advantage students in General Maths exams. If graphics calculators not used in the workplace should they be used in schools? No access to computers across the board.

Blue Group

Experiences

- IB course already has the statistical content that allows for option within the course (ext 2 courses)
- Multivariate data is a lot more powerful for student thinking
- Statistics should be an option at the senior levels
- Universities offer an extensive first year statistics unit that offers students the statistics they need for their courses (eg Wollongong)
- Need to look at the Stage 5 statistics to lead into a Stage 6 course
- Need to work with students to nurture them to have statistical reasoning and inference. Need to have more time exploring data at a school level

What do we need to do differently?

- Training
- Good data analysis is driven by questions – more like scientific method – asking questions and forming hypotheses
- Teacher training courses plus inservicing of current teachers
- Summer school for teachers 2008 – inservicing
- Confidence intervals – very hard
- Statistics for the citizen – good idea
- Post grad diploma in Maths/Stats
- Mathematicians come from 3 & 4 unit, therefore it is a good idea to put the easier statistics (basic concepts) into the 2 unit course

- High quality statistics into Ext 2 as an option
- Being able to question data into 2 unit and General

Green Group

- A different type of thinking that can be taught by non maths teachers.
- Currently no crossover into other subjects, would like to see more. Statistics is a uniquely flexible discipline with regard to crossing over between faculties and disciplines.
- Use of data from other departments. Assistance to other departments, analysing their data.
- First hand experience of there being a genuine difference that exists in how Statistics is taught. Some teachers don't feel qualified to even to teach the General Maths version of Stats. It would be good to have a separate course. Perhaps a 1-Unit course (general enthusiasm). There is only four units of science to choose from and there could be more. In other areas people can play more to their strengths, in maths you can only choose four at most.
- Uni point of view, need the solid maths (pure maths aspect) for the transfer into serious university work.
- Worry about the current lack of context/appreciation in the 2/3/4 unit courses.
- The idea of separation of the use of Statistics, which might be taken care of in lower level courses, but the deeper mathematical appreciation being taken care of in higher courses. Might solve the personnel problem too. Feelings for and against.
- Motivation by credit a good idea, but the universities would have to be confident that they were rewarding an appropriate course.
- Experience of Catholic System is that formal qualification is not so relevant. Experience and ability, combined with Principal's judgement.
- Perhaps don't make it too high powered. Don't turn people off.
- Don't make it so high powered
- The idea of a 1-unit course, lots of thoughts and enthusiasm, too fast for me to write down completely. Thoughts for and against. Good for the motivated students, but could turn others off.
- What should it be in a 1-Unit course?
- Confidence intervals and regression analysis too hard? No real progress made on this question (very big).
- Should be software based (university perspective). Find a balance between the doing by hand and use of software.
- Also find the balance between applied statistics, and the deeper theory.
- The irreconcilability of all aims.
- Discussion of the basic interdisciplinary structure of Statistics.
- University prefs
- Basic Numeracy is more important than anything else.
- Fractions, percentages and proportions are missing in people entering university.

At this point the general discussion went into meta-issues, to do with the breakdown of coherence between high-school and university.

- Problems with UAI scores driving education contributing to a downward spiral. Lack of numeracy making it difficult to teach anything.
- People going into uni's with only General Maths, even into general! Bridging course. Lots of emotion with regard to on-paper results driving choices, and making transition to University very difficult, and universities having to make up for what was discarded in the quest for results.

Silver Group

There was general concern that students doing General Maths at HSC were being enrolled in engineering and science courses. Removal of prerequisites for university courses was seen as an issue. Discussion centred on the role of careers advisors and their knowledge and understanding of mathematics courses. It was felt that this was a group that needed better information about mathematics and statistics requirements.

Concerns were also expressed about

- the mathematical understanding of teachers in Years 7 – 10;
- The lack of time for teachers to make the necessary connections. This point also led to some discussion about the time wasted after school. This point also led to some discussion about the time wasted after School Certificate in Year 10. If this time was available teachers would have more time to complete the syllabus and consolidate learning.

Syllabus

Good support material is needed for the syllabus, as well as professional development for teachers.

Since modern stats has a focus on modelling, this should be considered and might be incorporated into extension mathematics courses.

Report writing is an issue: many people writing reports at high levels in industry are not very literate, statistically or otherwise. Students need to develop these skills.

Statistics and mathematics are seen as different by students (and others). Coherence and connections are an issue for all teachers.

Professional development

Teachers need TIME more than anything else, to reflect and think. Suggestions were made about having some mandated professional development before teaching Year 12 students.

Teachers who have limited maths backgrounds are also of concern. This group is not consistent – they may teach maths for a year and then return to their own subject area depending on loads. These people rarely participate in mathematics PD because they don't see themselves as maths teachers. Heads of departments need to provide for non-specialists, including mentoring for extra accreditation, and the assumption must be made that these people are professional enough to take up PD opportunities. Mention was made of particular difficulties in rural schools where there may not be a suitable mathematics specialist. Current mentoring schemes focus on classroom management issues rather than content.

Current government initiatives for Summer Schools were not considered to be helpful. The “best” teachers may not be those getting the best marks so an issue is defining “best”. PD is needed not only for the best teachers.

Role of professional associations

Because professional associations are made up of volunteers who all have professional jobs their role is limited. Effective roles were seen as:

- Ensuring engagement with decision makers e.g., syllabus revision
- Providing expertise on a fee for service basis (although the point was made that schools' professional development funds are inadequate);
- Secondments of some kind between professionals and schools. This point was not elaborated clearly.

Most important points arising from the day

- Building “modelling” into the syllabus;
- Consideration being given to a UAI bonus for students doing high level maths;
- Use of the word “perspective” – the importance of seeing the big picture;
- Use of the word “coherence” – need for seeing the inter-relationships.
- Teachers need to have time to “smell the roses”.
- One pure mathematician gained a desire to find out more about statistics;
- “Process” is more important than the result – need more than the black box approach.

Gold Group:

NSW Institute of Teachers decree that only one Statistics subject in a degree could count towards accreditation as a Maths Teacher

- *The view was expressed that the Institute was too focussed on Pure Mathematics*

Why is Statistics important?

The role of Statistics in Secondary Education: which of the following questions is addressed in determining the role, and which should be?

- *How can Statistics best serve/be placed in the Mathematics Syllabus?*
- *How can the Mathematics syllabus best serve the discipline of Statistics?*
- *How does learning statistics address the educational needs of school students in terms of*
 - *producing statistically literate citizens (who need to be both numerate and literate in order to access statistical literacy);*
 - *assisting their learning in other disciplines;*

What Statistics should be in the Syllabus in each of years 5 -12? – and in what subjects?

- *What is it that we value and which is important to impart to students?*
- *Is the current content too mechanical, too mathematical, too non-mathematical, too boring?*
- *How can the syllabus be presented to support the development of skills in statistical thinking?*

What Statistical knowledge do Universities desire of their incoming students (and how discipline –specific is this?

- *Teachers have issues with the statistical knowledge that some Universities assume.*

Should there be a Statistics subject in the HSC?

Where other than mathematics (as well or instead?) should/could Statistics sit in the School syllabus.

Teachers have highly varied backgrounds and confidence in their capacity to teach Statistics.

- *Many have little formal exposure to statistics.*
- *There are real uncertainties re content and effective methods of teaching statistics.*
- *They seek and need help from academic Statisticians, the Profession and the Statistical Society.*
- *Could we have a DEST supported Statistics Summer School in 2008/09 or soon thereafter?*