

HoDoMs

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Dr Philippa Hemmings
Head, Mathematical Sciences Capability Delivery
EPSRC, Polaris House,
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5th August, 2011

Dear Philippa,

As a member of the Mathematics SAT committee, it was clear during our discussions that Statistics and Applied Probability were to be singled out for special attention. I believe that this was a direct response by EPSRC to the concern in the International Review of the problems of the smaller statistics units in departments in the UK, and their struggle in making strong appointments, particularly at a senior level.

However, the decision to focus solely on Fellowships in Statistics and Applied Probability seems to be a shock to the whole community. Frank Kelly has copied me the letter sent to David Delpy on behalf of CMS. Of course, HoDoMs concurs with the points raised in the letter on the importance of the availability of Fellowships across as wider spectrum as possible. There is a clear call in the letter to revoke your position on the Fellowship allocation.

If your position after assessing the CMS request is that you have no alternative to the decision you have made for the coming year, then I think the very least that is required of EPSRC is to communicate further with the community to allay fears on your future policy, and to assure us that it will not be so constrictive in the following years. Also, for you to give some idea of the percentage of funding that is involved in this fellowship switch away from other mathematical areas relative to the current total responsive mode funding might be useful. EPSRC has carefully argued in many venues that funding is never going to be zeroed in any area of Mathematical Sciences - this needs to be confirmed with some clarity in the current financial climate. Keeping up confidence in EPSRC across the mathematics community in these testing times should be a vital concern for all of us.

Returning to the core issue of Statistics and Applied Probability from a HoDoMs perspective - the International Review, instigated by EPSRC, raised many issues. It is clear that most of those issues cannot be addressed alone by the EPSRC. It can be argued that the problem of the small statistics groups within departments and the difficulty of recruitment has been caused as much by other agencies including the RAEs and outside pressures of employment. Certainly, I am sure that many heads would argue that your decision to restrict Fellowships to Statistics and Applied Probability will increase the strength of the strongest statistics departments in the UK, and not help the weaker units. While that policy will undoubtedly have some supporters, it may not be solving the problem originally raised by the International Review - indeed, several colleagues have pointed out that it has the potential to make things worse.

*Yours really,
David.*

Professor David Arrowsmith
Chair, Heads of Departments of Mathematics