

## Annual General Meeting 2020

Due to the current Coronavirus pandemic, this will be a virtual AGM.

Members will be invited to receive the Chair's Report, ratify Steering Group Membership for 2020/21, and provide feedback via an online portal during the 4 week period up to **4<sup>th</sup> September 2020**.

### Notice of Meeting and Associated Documentation

#### Agenda

1. Chair's Report
2. Secretary's Report
3. Treasurer's Report
4. Ratification of membership of Steering Group for 2020/21
5. Future plans for the sigma Network

#### Chair's Report

I am sure nobody needs reminding that 2020 has been a difficult and challenging year. The coronavirus pandemic has meant that work and domestic life have been substantially affected for everyone, and this includes members of our mathematics and statistics support community. In March 2020, UK "lockdown" meant that, literally overnight, universities were forced to shut their doors to staff and students, and people had to suddenly find ways to provide teaching and learning support remotely, using online tools with which they were not always familiar.

For tutors working in HE mathematics and statistics support, face-to-face interaction (either through one-to-one appointments, drop-ins or small group workshops) had generally been the main way of working. We now had the challenge to find out how to provide meaningful support to students remotely. What tools were available on our institutional VLEs? Can you really explain maths through a phone call? Will students want to attend virtual online sessions? Will we be able to pick up non-verbal clues as to students' understanding if we are communicating online? How can we effectively write out algebra or sketch a graph and share it remotely?

I am pleased to say that the **sigma** Network responded to these challenges swiftly and creatively:

- March (when lockdown was announced) saw a spike in messages to our Jiscmail mailing list ([www.jiscmail.ac.uk/sigma-network](http://www.jiscmail.ac.uk/sigma-network)), with people seeking and sharing advice and ideas on things such as providing remote tutorials, using MS Teams and identifying good tablet devices to be able to write and annotate maths on screen. Our Jiscmail list now has over 420 members, up from 380 this time last year, and continues to be a helpful and generous resource for people wanting to communicate with fellow members of the maths support community. During times of “lockdown” and “self-isolation”, the mailing list has proved invaluable, and I am grateful to those who share their insights and experiences so freely.
- Then in May 2020 the **sigma** Network held its first “virtual” workshop on the topic of providing mathematics and statistics support online. This proved hugely popular, with 287 registered attendees from 10 different countries. A recording of the day is available from our website (<http://www.sigma-network.ac.uk/sigma-online-support-workshop-29th-may-2020/>).
- In June 2020 we published the results of a wide-ranging survey into the changes in mathematics and statistics support practices brought about by the Covid-19 pandemic (link on the homepage of our website [www.sigma-network.ac.uk](http://www.sigma-network.ac.uk)). Particular thanks are due to Mark Hodds at Coventry University for organising and hosting the online workshop, carrying out the survey, and writing the detailed and insightful report.
- Also in June 2020, a special edition of the **sigma** Network Newsletter was brought out (<http://www.sigma-network.ac.uk/sigma-newsletters/>), with articles that captured practical approaches to delivering maths support remotely, and reflections on online learning and using appropriate technology, relevant during the current pandemic and the likely “new normal” thereafter. Thanks to Chetna Patel, our new newsletter editor, for making this happen.

As we continue to live with the restrictions for the foreseeable future, a sad consequence has been the cancelling of the 2020 CETL-MSOR Conference, which was due to be held in Cardiff in September. This annual conference has always been a great way for maths and statistics support practitioners to meet along with those with a wider interest in HE mathematics learning, teaching and assessment. It has also been the location for the Annual General Meeting of the **sigma** Network. With the conference cancelled, our AGM is now being held “virtually”, with this documentation made available on our website and a link to an online voting and feedback form being sent to those who have registered as Individual Members of the **sigma** Network.

With the pandemic still in the headlines, it is easy to forget that the academic year 2019/20 started quite normally! This was also true for the **sigma** Network. We kicked off the year in September and October as usual with a number of training events for tutors new to working in maths support. As in previous years, we deployed a collaborative model for tutor training, whereby centres who know they will need to train their own new tutors invite new tutors from other local institutions to join the training, which makes each course viable and allows an interesting cross-fertilisation of experiences and ideas. This year, training was run in 5 locations across the UK (Manchester, Greenwich, Belfast, Cardiff and Essex), and followed the tried-and-tested model developed by leading practitioners of the **sigma** Network.

The year continued with three substantial professional development events: “Mathematics learning activities for the transition to HE” at Wolverhampton; “Ideas exchange in statistics teaching and

support” at Sheffield Hallam; and “Addressing maths/stats anxiety” at Chester. These three events attracted around 100 participants and high quality keynote presenters, and received excellent feedback. Thanks are due to the event co-ordinators, and to their institutions for hosting the events so generously.

But then, from spring 2020, our planned programme of further face-to-face networking meetings and professional development events had to be put on hold, replaced by our online activities on behalf of the maths support community as described above. I sincerely hope that the **sigma** Network will be able to resume in-person meetings safely in 2020/21, since in my opinion nothing beats the opportunity provided by face-to-face events to make contacts, share informal ideas, plan projects and let off steam. That is what a thriving community of practice is all about!

The **sigma** Network would not operate (constitutionally and practically) without the commitment of its Steering Group, and as Chair I would like to acknowledge and thank them for their work during this difficult year. This AGM is where membership of the Steering Group for the coming year 2020/21 is formally ratified, and I hope that those who are entitled to vote will endorse this and thus show support and appreciation of those who are taking on this voluntary role on behalf of the **sigma** Network. The list of their names is included later in this document.

Meanwhile, I would like to record thanks and appreciation to a member of the Steering Group who is now stepping down. Hansa Bissoondeal joined the Steering Group in 2017, and for two years was a conscientious and enthusiastic editor of our Newsletter. She helped organise several **sigma** Network meetings and training events at Essex, where she has now moved into a more senior role providing maths support across the institution. I am sure that Hansa will remain a good friend of the **sigma** Network in the future.

Finally, on a personal note, I would like to inform the AGM that it my intention to step down now as Chair of the **sigma** Network. I have been involved in maths support for the past 30 years, having set up one of the country’s first maths support centres (or “maths workshops” as they were then known) in 1990. In 2010, I was appointed Co-ordinator of the East of England regional hub of **sigma**, and when HEFCE funding for **sigma** came to an end in 2016 I took the lead in drafting the constitution that would transition **sigma** to a voluntary professional association (the “**sigma** Network”), and became its Chair. Now, after four years in that role, it is high time I passed on the baton to somebody new. The new Steering Group will elect their new Chair at their first meeting in September 2020.

I would like to thank everyone who has contributed to the success of **sigma** and the **sigma** Network over the years. It has become recognised nationally and internationally as a marker of excellence in the provision of mathematics and statistics support in higher education, and people providing maths support in institutions across the country have done so much to increase the educational and career chances of students at all levels. I wish you every success in this in the future.

- *David Bowers*

## Secretary's Report

Two years ago, the **sigma** Network implemented a formal scheme for Individual Membership, in order to meet our obligations under our constitution to have a defined membership who can take part in deciding the direction of the Network and vote at the AGM on matters that require the formal approval of members. At the time of writing, over 140 people have signed up to show their support of the **sigma** Network, and new members continue to come forward each month. Membership indicates your professional commitment to the work of the **sigma** Network, and helps promote the importance of mathematics and statistics support more widely. In addition, registered members get advance notification of **sigma** Network events to enable early booking of popular events.

We thank Ed Southwood for his continued excellent work in his role as co-opted Membership Officer, ensuring that the membership database is kept up to date and held securely.

In the future we might wish to extend a more formal membership arrangement to institutions as well as individuals, but only if this would have clear benefits and sufficient support. Nothing will be done without consultation and approval from a future AGM .

- *Mary Lorimer*

## Treasurer's Report

This is a very brief report. Over the past 12 months, the **sigma** Network has been able to sustain its activities through the voluntary involvement of the Steering Group and other key players, with the support of their institutions. We are particularly grateful to Loughborough University for continuing to host our websites, and the University of Greenwich for hosting the MSOR Connections journal. Also, we acknowledge the generosity of many institutions in hosting meetings and events on behalf of the **sigma** Network this past year (including Cardiff University, Coventry University, Sheffield Hallam University, University of Chester, University of Essex, University of Greenwich, University of Manchester, University of Wolverhampton. Apologies for any omissions!)

Our bank balance (September 2020) stands at £624.80.

- Carried forward from September 2019: £624.80
- Income: zero
- Expenditure: zero

No formal audit was deemed necessary.

In the coming year we will be looking more actively at ways of generating income in order to be able to invest in future development work. Ideas of how to go about this - without risking the good will that currently exists within the maths support community - to sustain the ongoing work of the **sigma** Network would be welcome.

- *Chetna Patel*

## **Ratification of membership of Steering Group for 2020-21**

Nominations received (together with institutional statement of support):

Emma Cliffe	University of Bath
Nick Goddard	University of Chester
Mark Hodds	Coventry University
Mary Lorimer	Loughborough University
Tony Mann	University of Greenwich
Ellen Marshall	Sheffield Hallam University
Alun Owen	Coventry University
Chetna Patel	De Montfort University
Theresa Wege	Loughborough University
Robert Wilson	Cardiff University

Plus 4 co-opted members . . .

Representative of the IMA	Duncan Lawson
Representative of the SMSN	TBC
Representative of the IMLSN	TBC
Membership database officer (Bath)	Ed Southwood

## **Future Plans for the sigma Network**

Suggestions and ideas that reflect the interests of HE mathematics and statistics support practitioners are invited from the meeting, please describe these in the online voting and feedback form. They may also be submitted directly at any time to [chair@sigma-network.ac.uk](mailto:chair@sigma-network.ac.uk)