

## UKeiG Meetings Charges

UKeiG's programme of meetings during the past year has proved successful. We are repeating some of the more popular ones and have extended the location of the meetings to Belfast, Manchester and Edinburgh as well as London. We hope therefore that these developments and the wide range of topics that the meetings cover help to cater for the differing needs of UKeiG members.

It has become clear that the costs of some meetings will have to be increased. This is largely because we are finding difficulty in identifying venues that have over 10 PCs at competitive prices. 10 PCs allows us to have two people sharing but limits the attendance to 20, so we have had on occasion to turn away delegates.

Unfortunately, we have therefore decided to increase the costs of PC-based meetings to cover the overall meetings costs:

**PC- based meetings:** £150 + VAT (£176.25) for members and £180 + VAT (£211.50) for non-members

**Other meetings:** No change – £130 + VAT (£152) for members and £160 + VAT (£188) for non-members

We have still maintained our policy to keep the costs as low as possible, and feel that these meetings are still excellent value for money.

We are very grateful for those who provide venues for our meeting and would like to ask other UKeiG members to let us know if they could possibly provide additional venues, including those in London, that have more than 10 PCs for use by delegates.

Please contact the Secretary, Christine Baker ([cabaker@ukeig.org.uk](mailto:cabaker@ukeig.org.uk)), if you know of a suitable venue. Your help would be most welcome.

## Meeting Review

### Statistics minus the lies and damned lies

#### UKeiG Meeting held at CILIP, London, Tuesday 7<sup>th</sup> June

As a librarian working in a busy academic library service, students have asked me pretty much every question under the sun. A healthy sprinkling of queries tends to involve the acquisition of statistical data somewhere along the line, so whether the enquirer is a sports scientist (Q: "How many people in the UK died in extreme sporting accidents last year?" A: "ROSPA haven't published the data yet") or a geographer (Q: "What was the average rainfall in August in Sheffield last year?" A: "181.0mm – Met. Office website"), it pays to have a few statistical resources up one's cardigan-sleeve.

The questions above highlight one of the first issues on the agenda at UKeiG's workshop, **Statistics minus the lies and damned lies**, the distinction between statistics from official and non-official sources. Official statistics, often a result of governmental daily business such as recording births, marriages and deaths should be relatively easy to find in this golden age of IT, but as the day progressed, participants saw how difficult it can be to a) find the data you want, and b) re-trace your steps to find a statistic that you know fine well exists, and you would be

able to find if only National Statistics Online hadn't changed its navigation three times in the last fortnight. Non-official statistics, often produced by charities or companies, can be just as valuable as official statistics. Hunting down a particular non-official statistic can be time consuming as some can prove elusive, and the unwary searcher could face several dead ends before finally locating a promising looking web link and (if the information isn't free), being asked for a payment.

Finding apparently free information is a frequent source of irritation to anyone seeking out statistical information online, and web sites often offer loss leading nuggets of information, only to demand payment when any finer detail is required. The data collected from certain surveys for example, may be available for free at an elementary level; the broad findings or individual statistics perhaps feature in the media, but if you want to read the full findings there may a fee.

Whilst I have mentioned online statistical resources here, the value of printed resources was not ignored. The presenters, Tracy Kent and Gerald Watkins brought along several publications containing information that just isn't available online. Frustratingly, it seems that some printed publications are no longer produced on the pretext that websites have now superseded them and are more easily updated (this is not to suggest that online sources are always bang up to date!). At the risk of sounding like a nit-picking fuss-pot, the danger inherent in this trend is that whilst no-one would ever dream of producing a book without an index or a contents page, websites (even some of the biggies like National Statistics Online) don't necessarily have tip-top navigation, or the money to upgrade the systems behind them. This is of course a deeply unsatisfactory situation, and what all these people need is a good talking to by people like Tracy and Gerald who know what they are talking about!

Keeping older printed statistical resources is also essential, given that many web resources rarely have comprehensive historical collections of data. Fortunately for workshop participants, Tracy and Gerald produced a comprehensive booklet listing some likely printed and electronic sources. This excellent booklet has the makings of a great web resource, of the well indexed and frequently updated variety.

Mike Quiggin of RadStats – the radical statistics group and the BRC (Bradford Resource Centre and Community Statistics Project) was careful to point out that investigating who has produced the statistics you are using, who paid for their production, why and how they were produced, can provide you with a more informed and intelligent perspective. Developing an eye for such information can leave one less open to the lies referred to in the workshop title. Mike also raised the fact that governments are increasingly keen on producing performance related statistics, and in the case of the NHS, such statistics have heavy political overtones.

This UKeiG workshop was a varied and interesting look at a complicated area of information retrieval. I was keen to get my hands on the resources mentioned, and felt that had the day been able to mix in perhaps two practical computing sessions, we would have engaged more actively with the information given. I think I learned more than ever before, the value of knowing your sources, the nature of statistical information requires that the searcher should be prepared to be persistent and expect information in a wide variety of formats both print and electronic. Some good advice was presented here, and the accompanying course booklet will certainly not acquire dust at the bottom of my desk drawer.

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