

Working Towards the Examinations of the Royal Statistical Society

DISTANCE LEARNING PROGRAMME

The Society and its Examinations

The Royal Statistical Society, having merged with the Institute of Statisticians, is now one of the major professional bodies for statisticians in the world. Its examinations provide a pathway from school to professional status as a statistician. There are three levels, the Ordinary and Higher Certificates and the Graduate Diploma. The examinations are often taken by parttime study alongside work experience in a statistical job. The examinations are recognised as an honours degree equivalent by many employers, eg Civil Service Statistician Class and are accepted by universities as satisfying the admission requirements for a Master's degree in Statistics, Official Statistics, Operations Research and related subjects.

Further information about the examinations can be obtained by writing to the Royal Statistical Society, 12 Errol Street, London EC1Y 8LX, Tel (0)171 638 8998, or see their web pages at <http://www.rss.org.uk>

About the Courses

The courses are an addition to sustained personal study. They are not a substitute for reading textbooks, making notes and solving problems.

Each course is a distance learning package designed to enable you to:

- make effective use of your study time by guided reading accompanied by complementary notes,
- test your knowledge by solving graded problems and receiving feedback with your corrected solutions,
- have your misunderstandings and queries resolved by a tutor.

Above all we aim to maintain your enthusiasm for statistical study and enhance your enjoyment of learning.

How it all Works

You tell us about your previous studies, your work experience and what examinations you would like to sit. We agree a study plan between us. This is a realistic programme designed around the study time you have available and reflects the competing demands of your home, work and hobbies. Once agreed, we expect you to stick to the plan.

You will receive a series of study guides to direct your reading and note taking. Each guide will contain problems to be solved. Your efforts in solving the problems are a vital part of the learning process. A tutor will correct your solutions and provide outline solutions to all problems in each study pack. Your tutor will answer queries arising from your reading and problem solving. Interaction with your tutor is the key ingredient for success and enjoyment. The majority of communication will be by airmail or first class post but fax, telephone and email will be used when the need arises.

What kinds of people apply for this course?

In the main, those for whom a fulltime course is not possible. Some students have personal or business commitments which prevent them from being full-time students; others have no way of funding attendance at a fulltime course. Often parttime study would be possible, but in statistics especially at more advanced levels, this is not widely available. Distance learning is a flexible response to all these problems.

Students are of all ages and from many countries. They have numerous reasons for wanting to study. Some wish to improve their skills within their current employment with a view to promotion or moving into the new area. Some wish to start a new career or to return to work after a career break.

Here are some 'pen portraits' of previous students. They both work for Customs and Excise but other students have been employed by hospitals, pharmaceutical companies, national government departments and local government, such as school libraries or education departments.

“I work for HM Customs and Excise as manager of the Enquiries and Admin team in Norwich VAT office, I am 43 years of age. About a year ago I saw an item in our staff Bulletin inviting people who were interested in finding out about statistics and maybe even gaining a qualification to get in touch. As I use Maths in my job and have always enjoyed playing with figures I decided to take the plunge. My employer agreed to fund the course, so I embarked on the Ordinary Certificate course.

“When the first guided learning packs arrived my heart sank as I flipped through and saw all sorts of unfamiliar terms and expressions. Nevertheless, I have committed myself and I am not one to give up easily. I had some trouble obtaining books from the reading list, particularly as Norwich Central Library had recently burned down, plus some books on the list were no longer in print, but I eventually acquired a good range. I had planned to study one or two evenings a week, plus time at the weekend, but I found in the end it was better to have a longer period of uninterrupted time (when my husband and son weren't there!) so I resorted to using annual leave and flextime. From experience, I would suggest a quiet room with no distractions as working by correspondence there is no one to turn to for help and you need to work it out for yourself.

“Some modules seemed very easy, especially where they were relevant to my job, and I dashed through them. Others were completely new to me and sometimes I found it better to put the problem down and come back to it later, hoping for inspiration! My tutor was very helpful because, when I sent in my answers to set questions I would sometimes ask for clarification of certain points or help with problems and I always received clear explanations and helpful feedback.

“Revising for the exam proved nervewracking, not having done anything like this since I was 18! My employer allowed me five days special leave, which I used for revision over the last month. My tutor sent me lots of exam questions to try and answer without referring to the books and I think this helped a lot. I wrote out all the main formulae and expressions on cards so I could test myself and be tested, and by the time of the exam I felt I had gone over everything. I am happy to say that all this work proved worthwhile, as I managed to pass the exam with credit!”



“I am 44 years old and live with my wife and two children in Norfolk. My interests include DIY, swimming, cycling and campaigning for road safety through membership of The Pedestrians Association. Prior to my present study of statistics, my last academic work was in 1970 when I passed my A’levels in Physics and Mathematics. For the past 23 years I have worked for HM Customs & Excise at various locations around the country and in a variety of work areas. I currently work in VAT Assurance – checking that the trader population declares the correct amount of tax to the Government. The Department is undergoing a period of great change and contraction and in VAT this involves moving away from routine examinations of traders accounts towards risk assessment and targeting of high risk areas. About three years ago, remembering a brief introduction to statistics that I had received at school, I picked up a book on the subject to see if it had any relevance to my work. It did and I immediately became fascinated by the subject and started formal study, first for A’level, then the RSS Higher Certificate and now Graduate Diploma. The courses have been funded by the Department and in my day to day work I am able to utilise the statistical skills that I am acquiring.”

How to apply

The examinations for the Royal Statistical Society are held in May each year, so you should think carefully about the study time you have available from now until next April. You should plan a 24 week study session leaving time for holidays and a final revision period before the examinations in May. Applications can be made throughout the year, many of our students apply in June.

A rough guide to the number of years study needed for each examination is:

Ordinary Certificate (2 papers) 1 year

Higher Certificate (3 papers) 2 years

In choosing your courses you should pay attention to the Society's regulations on the order in which examinations can be attempted.

Choose a scheme of study which you think you can manage comfortably, complete the application forms and send them to us together with the course fees. We will acknowledge your application by sending you a suggested study programme.

Further Information

If you have queries or would like advice prior to making an application, contact:

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How to Obtain Help with Paying Course Fees

We can offer advice and support to you, but the initiative and responsibility for any application for assistance with fees must come from you. There are several sources of financial help for students. Not all of these sources are open to all students, and if you accept help from one source this may make you ineligible for help from other sources.

- 1) If your employers agree to sponsor you for the course, then you can ask them to complete the sponsorship section on the enclosed application form. We will then invoice the company directly for your fees.
- 2) Southampton Statistical Sciences Research Institute offers a limited number of bursaries to privately funded students. Bursaries can cover up to one quarter of the total fee. Please indicate on the application form whether you wish to receive a Bursary Application form.
- 4) The costs of vocational training are eligible for tax relief. The Inland Revenue Information Leaflet IR119 gives the detailed information. At present courses leading to the RSS Certificates and Diploma are not approved vocational qualifications and so are not eligible for automatic tax relief at source. However you may like to approach your tax office to seek relief on an individual basis. This position may change in the future.
- 5) If you are paying your fees yourself, it is possible to pay in instalments. Please indicate on the application form if you would like further details of payment dates and amounts.

Some Important Questions You May Wish to Ask

1) How do I know whether I should apply for the ordinary Certificate (OC), Higher Certificate (HC)

If you possess O'level or GCSE (grade A, B or C) in Mathematics or Statistics and in English (or equivalent qualifications), you may join the course leading to the OC examinations.

2) Are the courses completely self contained?

No. You will need to buy the textbooks recommended for each course and provide your own stationery, such as pens, graph paper and a calculator. If you are based in a remote area outside the UK, we are happy to supply you with certain textbooks, paper, pens and a suitable solar powered calculator. These are supplied at cost price plus postage. Full details and an order form are provided separately.

3) What will I be expected to do during my study time?

Each course is made up of a series of study guides. Each guide contains a directed reading scheme. For each topic your attention will be drawn to particular sections of one or more textbooks. Sometimes there will be additional notes to complement the text. You will need to **make your own study notes** on the reading as you go along.

To complement the textbook and notes each guide contains worked examples to enable you to practice using the new ideas from the reading. Your tutor is available to answer queries and resolve difficulties.

Each guide has a tutor assignment. This is a set of old examination questions or questions of this standard. You should attempt these problems and send your work to your tutor. It will be used to assess your progress and provide additional help when and where it is needed.

4) How do I communicate with my tutor?

Most communication will be written via email or we use the fastest mail service available in each case. However there are occasions when a rapid and straightforward response is needed, eg a short list of queries on some reading, difficulty with the solution to a problem, in these cases fax and telephone are very effective. We have a 24hour answerphone and 24hour fax line where you can leave your message. Your questions will be answered as soon as possible.

5) What role will my tutor play?

Your tutor will send you the next study guide as soon as your previous tutor assignment is received. Your assignment will be marked, feedback given and your progress monitored. If it is appropriate you will be sent additional study material or advice when your marked assignment is returned.

The key to getting the best from your course is frequent communication with your tutor. These interactions are central to successful completion of the course. It is this two way communication which changes a correspondence course into a distance learning package.

6) How many hours per week should I spend on my studies?

As a very rough guide:

Ordinary Certificate (2 papers) 8 hours

Higher Certificate (3 papers) 12 hours

If you have taken some examinations in the previous year, you may find that these times are generous. If you are returning to study after a break of several years you may need more time, especially in the early stages. The most important thing is to have a realistic timetable taking account of all your personal circumstances and then stick to it. We will take time at the beginning to help you do this.

7) How do I enter for the examinations?

You must register **directly** with the Royal Statistical Society in London. This is your responsibility. Please make your initial inquiries by January of the year in which you wish to sit the examinations. You are also responsible for paying your membership and examination fees.

8) Do I have to sit the examinations?

No. You may wish to increase your knowledge and skills as part of continuing professional development without necessarily seeking to obtain a formal qualification. A number of students have done this in the past.

10) What opportunities are there for meeting my fellow students and tutor?

Each year we plan to hold a three day 'School' in early January in the Department of Social Statistics at Southampton.

The aim of these meetings is to provide an opportunity for students and tutors to meet each other. There will be lectures on topics from the syllabus and time to ask questions individually on the learning material provided. There will be workshops on related topics and computer packages will be available to support the study material.

These meetings have been helpful to those who have attended previously.

Further information about these will be posted on the website.