



Proceedings of The Statistical and Social Inquiry of Ireland

One hundred and Sixtieth Session: 2006/2007

First Meeting

The first meeting of the session was held in the Royal Irish Academy, on Thursday, 19th October 2006, at 6:30 pm. The President, Aidan Punch, was in the Chair when Mr. Jerry Sexton presented a paper entitled, *A Review of Recent Trends in Output, Employment, and Productivity in Ireland*.

The paper reviewed real output, employment and productivity trends in the Irish economy over the ten year period from 1995 to 2005. Seven sectors were distinguished, including high technology industry, building and construction, and financial and business services. The results highlighted that productivity growth in the economy noticeably slowed in recent years, due to declining productivity levels in the building, the financial and business sub-sectors. A comparative analysis put the trends identified in the context of trends in the EU and in the US. Mr. Sexton concluded by briefly treating some policy options.

The vote of thanks was proposed by Professor Patrick Paul Walsh (TCD) and seconded by Mr. Mick Lucey (CSO). Contributions from the floor were received from Professor John Fitzgerald (ESRI), Dr. Brian Hueston (DIT), and Dr. Roy Johnston. Mr. Sexton replied to the discussion and the President brought the meeting to a close, thanking the author and the contributors.

Second Meeting

The second meeting of the session was held in the Institute for International Integration Studies, Trinity College Dublin on Thursday, 30th November 2006, at 6:30 pm. The President, Aidan Punch, was in the Chair when Mr. Paul McNicholas (TCD) presented the Barrington Lecture entitled, *Association Rule Analysis of CAO Data*.

Paul presented an analysis of Central Applications Office (CAO) applications using data-mining techniques to investigate relationships between course choices across applicants. Specifically he sought to answer the questions: (i) whether gender was a significant factor in course selection, and (ii) whether it is was the topic area or perceived status of the course reflected in entry points that predominated in course selection. Unsurprisingly, gender imbalances were significant in areas like primary teaching and engineering, along with some others. No evidence was found to suggest that students are selecting courses based on points' status. Rather, the association rules generated suggested that students select courses based primarily on topic but sometimes with geographical location in mind.

The vote of thanks was proposed by Ms. Caitríona Ryan (Head of Policy & Planning, Higher Education Authority) and seconded by Ms. Claire Gormley (UCD School of Mathematical Sciences). The following also made contributed from the floor: Dr. Miriam Hederman O'Brien, Dr. Deirdre Toher (UCD), Professor Paul Walsh (TCD), Dr. Brendan Murphy (TCD) and Dr. Patrick Quill (CSO). Mr. McNicholas replied to the discussion and the President brought the meeting to a close, thanking the author and the contributors.

Third Meeting

The third meeting of the Society was held in the Institute for International Integration Studies, Trinity College Dublin on Thursday, 1st February, at 6:30 pm. The Vice President Brendan Walsh was in the Chair when Professor P.J. Drudy (TCD) presented a paper entitled, *Housing in Ireland: Philosophy, Affordability and Access*.

Professor Drudy argued that analyzing housing in Ireland as an investment or capital good, as is commonly done, identifies many 'winners' over the past few decades: private developers, the government through revenues from stamp duty, capital gains tax and VAT on building materials, home owners through price appreciation. However there are losers, as affordability of either renting or purchasing has declined. He argued for another perspective, one based on housing need. From this perspective, he outlined how recent prices rises were significantly above the cost escalation of building, indicating a less than competitive market for this necessary good, which was now over-priced. The extent of "housing need" was examined and how it was answered, including through social housing provision and by means of the private rented sector. He questioned the rationale for many recent initiatives, including selling social housing at a discount while buying such housing at market prices.

The vote of thanks was proposed by John O'Connor, (Affordable Housing Partnership) and seconded by Jerome Casey (economic consultant in the construction industry). A lively debate followed with contributions from: Unis O'Connor (UCD), Dr. Roy Johnston, Mary Doyle, Tom O'Connell (Central Bank), Aedin, Brian Hughes (DIT), Dr. Paul Gorecki (The Competition Authority), Brendan Walsh. Professor Drudy responded and the Vice President brought the meeting to a close, thanking the author and the contributors.

Fourth Meeting

The fourth meeting was held in the Institute for International Integration Studies, Trinity College Dublin, on Thursday 1st March at 6:30 pm. The President, Aidan Punch, was in the Chair when Steve MacFeely (Central Statistics Office) presented a paper entitled, *A Statistical Profile of Irish Domestic Tourism, 2000–2005*.

Steve MacFeely provided a detailed analysis of Irish domestic tourism, showing that trips and expenditure grew by 31% and 65% respectively of the six year period. He decomposed the headline growth into several factors, including the growths in population, immigration, employment, incomes and prices. He highlighted a structural change on the supply side, notably the decline of the B&B sector and the emergence of holiday homes and showed the importance of the Greater Dublin Area to business tourism. He also gave a brief analysis of the differing tourism patterns for different age groups. He argued that same day visits are perhaps far more important to domestic and national tourism than previously realized, and suggested that tourism policy could give greater attention to the more robust domestic tourism market.

The vote of thanks was proposed by Professor Jim Deegan (University of Limerick) and seconded by Brian Maher (Fáilte Ireland). Contributions were received from: Jeff Byrne, Joe Tracy (CSO), Gerry O'Hanlon (CSO) and David Jennings (CSO). Steve responded and the President brought the meeting to a close, thanking the author and the contributors.

Fifth Meeting

The fifth meeting was held in McAuley House, 2-14 Castle Street, Belfast, on Thursday 19th April 2007 at 4.00 pm. The President was in the Chair. After the minutes were read, a resolution was put to the meeting by the President and passed by those present that this session be extended into June to accommodate the availability of one of the intended speakers. The President then invited Professor John Hills (London School of Economics & Political Science and also member of the UK Pensions Commission) to deliver his paper entitled, *Demographic Trends and the Future of Pensions in the UK*.

The UK Pensions Commission Reports utilised demographic data and analysis (including projections of population change), and also examined trends in private pension saving and evolution of the State pension system. The Commission concluded that, without reform, structural problems with UK pensions would lead to increasingly inadequate and inequitable provision by 2020-2025. It recommended reforms which would lead to a more generous, more universal and less means-tested State system than would otherwise evolve, and the establishment of a low cost national pension savings scheme into which employees without good employer provision would be automatically enrolled. These recommendations imply eventual increases both in state spending on pensions as a share of national income and in State pension age, but accompanied by measures to facilitate later and more flexible retirement. Professor Hills expanded on why the Commission reached the conclusions it did. He treated and commented on developments since the Pensions Commission Reports, especially the subsequent Government White Papers and the current Pensions Bill in the UK.

The vote of thanks was proposed by Dr. Shane Whelan (UCD). Contributions from the floor were made by, amongst others, Ms. Marie Daly (IBEC & Pensions Board), Dr. Robert Beatty, and Damien Courtney (Cork Institute of Technology). Professor Hills replied to the discussion and the President closed the session thanking all who contributed.

Launch of On-line Archive of the Journal, 1847-2007

The formal launch of the on-line archive of the Journal, 1847-2007, took place in the Old Library Long Room, Trinity College Dublin on 16th May 2007 from 5 pm to 6:30 pm. The evening was co-hosted by the Provost of Trinity, Dr. John Hegarty, and the President, Aidan Punch. After speeches by the Provost and the President, Dr. Miriam Hederman O'Brien, Vice President, made a speech highlighting the significance of the event. Indeed, as she remarked, the annual Trinity Week Academic Symposium earlier that afternoon had taken as its theme '*Prejudiced Patriots and Dreams of Statisticians?* *Research, Public Policy and the Journey of a Journal from the Famine to the Digital Age*, which treated that issue in depth. The Symposium, to which all members were invited as well as others, was chaired by Professor Patrick Paul Walsh (in his capacity as Dean of Social and Human Sciences at Trinity). Three issues were addressed: the historical significance of the Journal, with speeches made by Professor Mary Daly (UCD) and Professor Eunan O'Halpin (TCD); how the online archive fits into a broader open access revolution in research dissemination, with overviews given by Professor Jane Grimson (TCD) and Ms. Niamh Brennan (TCD); the importance of dialogue between academics, civil servants and others in informing public policy, addressed by Mr. Gerry Donnelly (DETE) and Mr. Gerry Hanlon (CSO). Trinity College Dublin was thanked for the role it played in helping Council achieve its ambitions of bringing the work of the Society to a considerably larger audience. Special thanks were paid to Professor Patrick Paul Walsh, Honorary Secretary, by the President: "The

appointment of the young and energetic Professor Paul Walsh of Trinity College as one of the Honorary Secretaries of the Society with specific responsibility for the journal ensured that the project was bound to succeed. It is fair to say that he has been the driving force behind the archive project from the very start.”

Future Meeting

It is intended that the annual symposium will take place on 21st June 2007 at the Royal Irish Academy, Dublin 2, starting at 6:30 pm. The title of the symposium is: *Does Mother Know Best? The Role of Family, State and Private Crèches in Early Childhood Development*. The following have agreed to present papers: Professor Sheila Greene (TCD), Ms. Sylda Langford (Director General of the Office of the Minister of Children) and Professor Richard Tremblay (UCD).