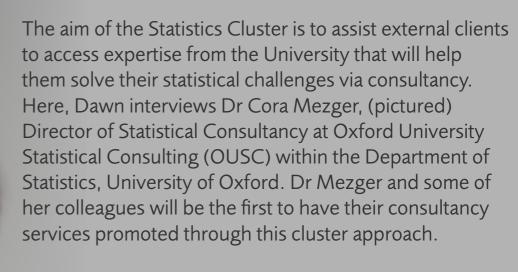# Statistical Consultancy from the University of Oxford

OUI's Dawn Gordon, Project Manager from Consulting Services at OUI, introduces the Statistics Cluster, a new initiative showcasing the consultancy capacity available across the University.

The aim of the Statistics Cluster is to assist external clients to access expertise from the University that will help them solve their statistical challenges via consultancy. Here, Dawn interviews Dr Cora Mezger, (pictured) Director of Statistical Consultancy at Oxford University Statistical Consulting (OUSC) within the Department of Statistics, University of Oxford. Dr Mezger and some of her colleagues will be the first to have their consultancy services promoted through this cluster approach.

Could you tell us more about OUSC?

We are a small team of full-time statistical consultants, based within the Department of Statistics at Oxford University. The aim of OUSC is to provide high quality statistics advice and services to both external clients and colleagues from other parts of the University. My role as Director of OUSC involves all aspects of a "consulting project cycle", which means identifying potential clients, liaising with clients to understand their problems and requirements, resource and time constraints, and then to determine and implement statistical strategies that are most appropriate for their specific project and context. Another important aspect is to enable good communication and feedback processes with clients or other stakeholders throughout the collaboration.

INNOVATION insights

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Being new to Oxford, could you tell us a little about your background and why you chose to move to the University of Oxford?

I am an applied statistician and my background is rather interdisciplinary, which I think is very helpful when working across a range of sectors and having to adjust the statistical methodologies and terminology to my counterparts. Before joining the University of Oxford, I led a team working in the area of Official Statistics in a global research consultancy that targets, in particular, developing countries. As part of that role, as well as during previous engagements with the United Nations and the French National Demographic Research Institute, I had the chance to work with government, business, and scientists from a wide range of disciplines. The new role with OUSC is a fantastic opportunity to bring statistical expertise to a wider range of clients by making use of capabilities both within the OUSC team and the Department more widely.

Can you describe some of the services provided by the OUSC team?

Some examples include: support to the study design, including sample size calculations and analysis plans, support to data collection and management, statistical analysis and testing, and advice on interpretation, communication and visualisation of findings. We are also happy to discuss requests for tailored training in statistical methods or software and can help clients with data quality assessment studies. We are currently involved in several projects in the medical field, but are also interested in engaging with clients from a wide range of sectors. Both I and my colleague Mariagrazia Zottoli have experience in the area of policy evaluation and official statistics, and so opportunities with government or charities are also relevant.

INNOVATION insights

Do you deal with shorter simpler consultancy requests, as well as larger/complex projects?

We really emphasise the importance of good engagement with potential clients from the very beginning to make sure everyone is on the same page regarding the scope of the statistical services required. These engagements can range from smaller projects of a couple of days to more sizeable projects of many months. The latter may also require bringing together and managing a small team of statisticians to ensure that all relevant capabilities are available. This is, in principle, possible given the excellent capacity available within the Department and the University of Oxford more widely, but would of course depend on the specific requirements.

And what does a typical consultancy request look like? Or are they all very different?

Some clients already have a very clear idea of the statistical inputs they need, while others know the questions they need answering, but may not be able to translate these into statistical concepts. In either case we would have one or several meetings and also go through documentation that can be provided to ensure we understand the background and aims, requirements regarding any particular statistical methods, any resource or time constraints, and which stakeholders we should engage with. Projects tend to be most effective when statisticians are involved from the early stages, so this is something we recommend.

In our experience, many non-statisticians may understandably have difficulties with statistical concepts. Therefore, our priority is to ensure that all advice and analysis is provided clearly and to the point, using minimum statistical jargon, with a clear explanation of the way we intend to tackle a client's request. Additionally, as I mentioned, we always involve the client in all phases of the consultancy project including the design of our intervention which benefits both OUSC and the client and helps to ensure the mutual exchange of knowledge. This ensures that our service is tailored to our client's needs.

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Could you describe how you and OUSC work together with OUI Consulting Services and what benefits this service & the Cluster provides OUSC?

OUI provide very high quality and efficient support to OUSC as well as to academics engaged in consultancy work, and of course, OUI has a wealth of networks and experience with a wide range of sectors. Knowing that the contractual aspects are all taken care of allows us to focus on the technical aspects of the request. We believe that the Statistics Cluster will give the expertise available at OUSC more visibility, and create more opportunities with potential clients interested in statistical support.

OUSC

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Thank you very much Cora, for sharing more about your work and the OUSC. We're looking forward to working with you to solve existing and new clients' statistical challenges from a broad variety of public and private industry sectors over the coming months and years!

For consultancy enquiries and contractual support please contact Dawn Gordon, dawn.gordon@innovation.ox.ac.uk

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