Teaching Statistics is an international journal. Its aims, as stated in the current version of its Notes for Contributors, are as follows. It is “aimed at teachers of students aged up to 19 who use statistics in their work. The emphasis is on teaching the subject and addressing problems which arise in the classroom. The journal seeks to support not only specialist statistics teachers but also those in other disciplines, such as economics, biology and geography, who make widespread use of statistics in their teaching. Teaching Statistics seeks to inform, enlighten, stimulate, correct, entertain and encourage”. It is published by Blackwells on behalf of the Teaching Statistics Trust, three times each year - normally February, May and September. It is a serious, established and long-term player in its field, and is indeed the only printed international journal aimed specifically at the teaching of statistics.

OK. So why should university teachers read it?

The short answer is that it contains a lot of ideas that can be used in early university courses and it keeps you in touch with developments at school that affect the students coming to you.

Start by looking at the journal’s website: http://science.ntu.ac.uk/rsscse/ts

Please note that this does not start with “www”. This is part of the website of the Royal Statistical Society Centre for Statistical Education at Nottingham Trent University, which acts as the administrative home of the journal. It carries general information about the journal, lists of current contents and compendia of the best articles from previous volumes. A very large number of past articles can be downloaded in PDF form.

The journal can also of course be found on the Blackwells website http://www.blackwellpublishing.com where, among other things, online subscription facilities are available.

It was founded in 1979, so 2003 is the 25th anniversary year. (Readers of MSOR Connections will of course have no difficulty in counting inclusively at both ends.) Previous editors have been Peter Holmes, who founded the journal, then David Green of Loughborough, then Neville Hunt of Coventry, and then me. Though it happens that I now work for the Royal Statistical Society, as Director of Education and Professional Affairs, and hence the “rss” email address that I have given, “Teaching Statistics” is not an organ of the Royal Statistical Society; it is quite separate from the Society’s own journal.

We are a fully peer-reviewed refereed journal. There is also an Editorial Board, which has the unenviable task of keeping the Editor under control but also, and importantly, looks at the strategic direction of the journal.

What we seek to do

First, what we do not seek to do. “Teaching Statistics” is not a research-oriented journal. There is of course a serious body of research in statistical education and plenty of journals in which this work is published. “Teaching Statistics” does not in general see this as part of its task. There are occasional exceptions, where the work is accessible and has a strong teaching focus, but these are very much the exceptions.

However, each issue carries a four-page insert provided by the International Association for Statistical Education. This “IASE Insert” carries all sorts of items...
of recent international news in statistical education. For instance, there are reports on recent international conferences; sometimes reports summarising the statistical education scene in a particular country; sometimes reports on recent items of research involving international aspects of statistical education. “Teaching Statistics” is very pleased to carry this insert regularly, as a service to the community in general, and perhaps as a vehicle for IASE to have its important work more widely known.

The journal as a whole, though, seeks to carry articles that are directly about the teaching of statistics. We invite authors to tell us about something they have tried in the classroom (or, in quite a few cases, by taking the class outside of the actual classroom) and which appears to have worked.

There really is no such thing as a “typical article”, but some illustrations are as follows. There have been articles about data collection exercises carried out “in the field”, in some sense. Many articles have been concerned with distilling statistical points from television programmes – for example, you may like or loathe television game shows (I readily confess to the latter), but they are very much in the public domain and have all sorts of possibilities for statistical analysis; and even yet we get new slants on lotteries. Still other types of articles have been introductions to comparatively advanced topics designed to be suitable for students at earlier stages. A recent example has been a really splendid introduction to bootstrapping. Data analysis is also of course to the fore in many articles. Quite often these come under a “Computing Corner” heading, where we have been particularly pleased to publish many articles on how to try to get the best (which can be very good, even though the defaults sometimes are not) out of Microsoft Excel. Other software programs are not overlooked - Minitab, for example, appears quite frequently.

Another quotation from our Notes for Contributors is “Contributions should be light and readable. Formal mathematics should be kept to a minimum”. Plenty of very learned research-oriented journals say something very like the latter, but in our case we mean it. Our articles are meant to be about the real actual practice of teaching the subject.

**So what is the attraction at university level?**

The phrase “aimed at teachers of students aged up to 19” in our Notes for Contributors has been crafted very carefully. It is deliberately meant to carry the interpretation of going into the start of a university course, a bit beyond normal school age. It is also deliberately meant to be less than totally prescriptive and to be open to this sort of interpretation.

Thus we are pleased to carry articles by university academics about interesting experiences in teaching statistics, particularly at an introductory level. And we are pleased to know that many academics are already readers of the journal. We want to help share good ideas.

No doubt there could be a very lively debate on what is, or ought to be, taught in the first year of a university course that contains some statistics. The debate would need to cover the school-university interface, bearing in mind that “school” can mean “further mathematics” as well as a single-subject mathematics qualification, either of which might (or might not) contain a substantial proportion of statistics. The debate would also need to look at the place of statistics in many different sorts of university courses, ranging from specialist statistics degrees to degrees in very many other subjects throughout the sciences and social sciences, and indeed elsewhere, where statistics is important as an ancillary subject. Though obviously similar, this is not quite the same debate as would occur regarding mathematics. Statistics really is in a somewhat different category.

The lively nature of this potential debate is part of the reason for our deliberate vagueness as to the upper bound of the age range of the students whose teachers we aim at. What is for sure is that much material that could be, and is, taught in the upper stages at school could also be, and is, taught in the lower stages at university - and vice versa. So we believe that any article that is aimed at teachers of, say, sixth-formers is also aimed at teachers of first-year university students - and, again, vice versa. And it is very much the case that, both at school and at university, this refers to students who are specialists and to those being taught in “service” mode. Of course the various teaching situations are different, and of course this means that different methods might be more likely to be needed. But everyone can benefit from looking at ideas developed by and for others. Minimally, you might find a new context that is just right for illustrating the method you are currently teaching; or a new slant on Excel that enables you to get a better display of the data. Going beyond that, you just might find an idea that really rejuvenates your whole approach.

We do sometimes get asked why we stop at 19 and do not go through to the end of a typical undergraduate course. Part of the answer to this is again that 19 is
deliberately a bit vague and that what is taught to some people before that stage might be taught to others after it. More important, though, is that we do not want to lose the schools focus of the journal. Many of the articles submitted for publication are already by university academics and, as I have mentioned, we are very pleased to receive and consider them. But we do not want to swamp out the school teachers. At the same time, we know that good teaching at universities is also important, and we want to do all we can to assist.

*Try it and see!*

Well, why not? A 2003 subscription for an individual in the UK is a mere £23. We have approaching 1000 subscribers, and last time we did a count these were distributed in 45 countries all round the world. Please join them, and give it a try for at least a year.

In the hope of whetting your appetite, the autumn 2002 issue contained seven articles: on voting methods, an introduction to the ideas of hypothesis testing, assessment using real data from CensusAtSchool, cleaning dirty data in Excel, a probability model for golf putting, classifying data displays found in popular software, and an example on the addition property of covariance. Other material included three book reviews, a letter to the editor and the regular “news and notes” section.

The easiest way to subscribe is on the Blackwells website. Go to [http://www.blackwellpublishing.com](http://www.blackwellpublishing.com), follow the links to journals and then to “Teaching Statistics”. There is also a direct link from the journal’s own website.

Please contact me directly with any more general queries about the journal (email preferred, please). And if you want to write for us, and tell us about something you have tried, please don’t hesitate!