

**Department of Computer Science  
University of Sheffield**

**Industrial Liaison Board  
Wednesday 10 May 2006**

**Attendance:** Charlie Blackburn, Kirill Bogdanov, Mandy Chessell (Chair), Tony Cowling, Phil Green, Stuart Green, Mike Holcombe, Monika Kus (Minutes), Steve Maddock, Dominic Watts.

**Apologies:** Steve Allott, Paul Berman, Mike Daley, Isabel Evans, Mark Johnston, Paul Marrow, Siobhan North, Stan Price, Daniela Romano, Mark Shackleton, Richard Tateson, Trevor Thruston, Chris Tofts, Richard Warden.

**1. Welcome and Apologies**

In the absence of Anthony Fretwell-Downing, Mandy Chessell welcomed the committee. At this point it was announced that the last item of the agenda had been replaced by a drinks party in the quad.

**2. Minutes of last meeting**

It was agreed that the minutes of the last meeting were a fair and accurate record.

**3. Head of Department Presentation**

Phil reported that the Department had a good year. The outcome of our intensive review was positive, with the University realising that we were a "class act" with a distinctive research profile and many unusual research interests, and accepting the argument that we had a support crisis. As a result we have been given three permanent support posts and our secretarial structure has been reviewed and re-organised. Additionally, a research programmer's post was made permanent, which will result in better support for our research activities.

We are also expecting to recruit a Business Development Officer/Administrator who would work with Genesys and organise work placements for students. It was originally thought that a software engineer would have been the right person to look after Genesys but an external consultant identified the need for a business development person instead. Business and research fellows are available in the University and we have a strong case in the bid for the position.

At this point Mike Holcombe described the purpose and activities of Genesys and emphasized its uniqueness.

Another achievement for the Department was our improving undergraduate recruitment. Despite falling student intake in Computer Science and related subjects, nationally and internationally, our position is improving with a 25% increase.

We believe that Genesys and other enterprise types of learning contributed to our recruiting success. We interviewed all students this year and this seems to be paying off. More students come to our open days and most of them feel valued because of the interview process. As Sheffield appears to have an image problem, once people visit, they realise it is a nicer place than they had thought.

Our applications for 2006/07 are up by 15%, with the national trend of -10%. Although we have seen a healthy increase over the last 2 years, we are nowhere near the average for the last decade.

Our current quota for undergraduate intake is 60 (down from 75).

The ratio of staff to students has reduced from 1:20 to 1:12, which brings it closer to other engineering departments.

We did well in the annual student satisfaction survey which all students were asked to fill in on graduation. We were the 4<sup>th</sup> highest ranking department out of 100 and the highest ranking department in this University.

The big problem we are facing at the moment, together with the rest of the University, are falling MSc numbers. This might be due to visa problems and our competitors getting stronger. With overseas universities having improved their standards, there is less incentive for students to move abroad and the UK does not appear as attractive as before. This is causing financial crises in many British universities and we are no exception.

The MSc admissions situation at the moment looks similar to last year's but there are many variables of what can happen by the end of September.

Software Systems Technology course has been restructured into Software Systems and Internet Technology which is a much more focussed degree although still a conversion course for students without a degree in Computer Science. A new course - Human Language Technology - is also being offered, with some funded places and equipment. As with any specialist course, no huge student numbers are expected.

We are pleased with our PhD student numbers.

Our research income is pretty high at the moment. Between May 2004 and April 2005 we won grants to the value of £4.07 mln and between May 2005 and April 2006 to the value of £6.75 mln.

Some major awards since May 2005 include:

- Software Observatory
- Segmentation Gene Function
- X Media – a biggest single grant of £1.4 mln
- TAO MediaCampaign
- GATE
- POP
- SPECS

Grants in negotiation are:

- Companion IP
- AMIDA

### **Enterprise Computing**

We are currently discussing a new degree course with E-skills who are able to provide funding for a computing based degree with elements of business, management and personal skills. The course is expected to have equal proportions of each element.

As we already offer some of the material through our Cross-over project, Software Hut and Genesys, E-skills accept that we are well prepared to run the course. They will be able to fund an additional lectureship until 2008, which should become self sustained afterwards. The course is expected to increase student numbers by 30 and the University is very keen for it to go ahead.

We tried to run a joint degree with Information Studies but the University did not see that it would bring sufficient student numbers in to justify the initial effort.

We are already advertising a degree in computing, business and finance and have some applications for it. If we are awarded the lectureship for the Enterprise Computing course, it would also help running the current business and finance degree. It was agreed that the lecturer appointed for the position should become an ILB member.

It is strongly believed that the course title should not include IT or Information Technology and the title of Enterprise Computing is supported by TeachCom.

## **4. Industrial Collaboration**

Mike appealed to the external members for help and involvement in providing work placements and general company links as we need to give students industrial experience. It was suggested that presentations be run by guest companies on life in the software industry. These would be welcome and

beneficial to our students. We could also start running specialised careers fairs and perhaps combine them with talks/presentations by guest speakers. The new Business Development Administrator would ideally be in charge of the events.

It was agreed that the best time for the events would be November, perhaps during the nominal reading week. There is a possibility that the events could be funded by the White Rose University Consortium.

It appears that student presence at such events is quite low unless lectures are cancelled to allow for attendance. We have to make the students understand that the events are important to their careers.

Dominic Watts stated that Microsoft would be interested in the new degree graduates but at the moment they have internship schemes aimed at sales and marketing roles.

We have a good relationship with IBM who have already sponsored Genesys and an offer from Accenture of sponsoring Software Hut. We would like to encourage this kind of longer term relationship.

Charlie Blackburn reported that Reuters are often disappointed with CVs coming from students who are not selling themselves well to companies.