



## Minutes Meeting of Industrial Liaison Board

- Date: 9 May 2007
- Present: Kirill Bogdanov, Tony Cowling, Anthony Fretwell-Downing (chair), Nick Garner, Marian Gheorghe, Phil Green, Mike Holcombe, Monika Kus (minutes), Phil McMinn, Steve Murphy, Stan Price, Fabrice Saffre, Sarah Walker.
- Apologies: Steve Allott, Guy Brown, Mandy Chessell, Isabel Evans, Stuart Green, Steve Maddock, Tony Simons, Trevor Thruston.

### 1. Welcome and apologies

Anthony Fretwell-Downing welcomed the committee and the apologies were read.

### 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

In his report on the departmental activities in the previous year, Phil commented on the state of our student recruitment, research progress and the new degree of Enterprise Computing.

We have managed to reach the revised quota of 60 undergraduates but our prediction for the current year intake is not very good and we are likely to have to enter clearing. Despite our good rating in the National Student Survey as the 6<sup>th</sup> computer science department in the country, we are struggling with our student intake. This year it is proposed to revise entry requirements from BBB to a range of ABB – BBB as students tend to choose the higher offer. We are working on our outreach activities together with two faculty recruitment officers currently based in Computer Science.

Our MSc applications have risen dramatically this year, compared to last year.

The research student intake has fallen slightly and the ways of financing research students remains a problem.

DCS is doing well in terms of research funding, having won the following:

- £10M funding secured in 2005-6 (double previous highest)
- Coordinating 2 EC Integrated projects, heavy involvement in 2 more

- Some major successes in 2005-6
  - The Sheffield Software Engineering Laboratory (Holcombe, Cowling, Gheorghe, EPSRC)
  - Several successes in Computational Systems Biology (Monk, Smallwood)
  - Several successes for the GATE team in NLP (Cunningham, Bontcheva)
  - The EC Integrated Project COMPANIONS, which we coordinate (Wilks, Hepple, Moore)
  - The EC Integrated Project AMIDA (Hain, Green, Moore)

We have received £200,000 from e-skills UK to establish a degree in Enterprise Computing and have appointed Phil McMinn as Course Lecturer and Steve Murphy as Genesys and Business Manager. The course is expected to recruit 30 undergraduates per year. The funding from e-skills is secured until March 2008 and we are trying to obtain support from the University and make the posts permanent.

It was pointed out that computer science departments in general, both in the UK and the US, are facing a dramatic decline in popularity at undergraduate level. In 2001 our intake figures doubled but since then have fallen to the 1996 level. There are many reasons for this decline: the job prospects are not perceived as attractive, major software projects are moving abroad, computer science is viewed as a discipline for geeks, top up fees are having an adverse effect. It appears that decisions about future careers are made at an early age and pupils are not receiving enough guidance from their careers teachers who are themselves not familiar with computer science.

The University suffered some unexpected financial losses and capital investment already committed has led to the financial crisis.

The Department has been experiencing some staffing problems this year. Our head of support left and so far we have been unable to replace him. A secretarial post promised by the ADC has not released yet. Also the Enterprise Computing posts are being funded for 18 months only. It is very difficult to replace a staff member who has left or retired.

A Guardian league table for computer science departments lists Sheffield at No 17. This low rating could be affected by the low spending per student by the University as a whole. The building of Information Commons should improve these figures. The Department itself is also investing in replacing equipment as a rolling programme.

### **3. Genesys and Enterprise Computing**

Steve commented that it was apparent that Genesys was functioning well but the lack of continuity of service after students have left was a serious issue. The solution would be to employ students on the external payroll so that the projects continue while teaching has stopped. Other services offered by Genesys could be consultancy and business support. Genesys is expected to become a fully functional business unit soon.

Phil explained that the aim of the Enterprise Computing course is to combine computing, engineering, business and management, with Genesys playing a very important part. Other modules taken by students would include regular Computer Science modules, some from Mechanical Engineering and some from Management. Industry gurus would be invited to give lectures to aid the enterprise aspect of the course. We have had 20 applicants so far but are expecting more next year.

Both Genesys and Enterprise Computing are seen as our unique selling points and there is more potential for development in Genesys which could become a dual enterprise - Genesys Software and Genesys Research.

#### **4. General discussion**

It was noted that some students are surprised by the experience of **Genesys** while some are aware of it before they come. Both groups find Genesys a useful experience of a real workplace. IBM take part in Genesys activities in the first few weeks of term. It is a challenging period when skills assessment and team creation takes place. The speed coder challenge – software development in 6 hours - prepares students for working in industry

Preparations for the **RAE** are going well, we believe we have 40 four star papers in the Department. We have solid evidence of the quality of our research and a reputation for research leadership and successful co-ordination of large projects. Our research group interests overlap and we carry out interdisciplinary work with other departments. Academics and researchers are encouraged to explore areas they are interested in.

External members of the ILB were asked to **support the case for the extension of the e-skills posts**. This was agreed in principle.

#### **5. Result of the Best Poster Competition**

It was agreed that the best poster was presented by Kudzana Myezwa.