

Minutes of the 58th meeting of the UK Computing Research Executive Committee on Tuesday 26 October 2021 at 11:00, held online

PRESENT

Jane Hillston (Chair)	Ann Blandford	*David De Roure
Michael Fisher	Andy Gordon	David Hutchison
Chris Johnson	*Kevin Jones	Jie Xu

BY INVITATION

Nadia Berthouze (Membership Panel Chair)	James Dracott (EPSRC)	Rachel Lamb (EPSRC)
Alex Oliver (EPSRC)	Edmund Robinson (CPHC)	Bill Mitchell (BCS alternate)

IN ATTENDANCE

Maxine Leslie (BCS)

APOLOGIES

Amir Hussain	Bashar Nuseibeh	m.c. schraefel
Michelle Busson (IET)	Alastair Irons (BCS Academy)	Ahmed Kotb (IET)
Jessica Phillips (EPSRC)		

**attended part of the Exec meeting*

1. WELCOME AND APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

The Chair welcomed Members to the meeting, particularly new Executive Committee Members Michael Fisher (Manchester), Andy Gordon (Microsoft Research/Edinburgh) and Amir Hussain (Edinburgh Napier). A Hussain was not in attendance and apologies for absence were received as above.

The Chair thanked outgoing members Bashar Nuseibeh, m.c. schraefel and in particular Ann Blandford for her service as an Exec Committee member and as Chair.

2. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

The minutes of the meeting held on Tuesday 29 June 2021 were APPROVED and are now ready for transfer to the UKCRC website. *[Post meeting note: action complete]*

3. MATTERS ARISING

UKCRCEC meeting held on 29 June 2021

Consultations and submissions, item 5: Members were keen for a further Policy Engagement workshop to be staged and E Robinson offered CPHC's help. The Chair suggested January 2022, which would make it a year since the first workshop. It would be good to have a greater reach and there were quite a few changes to take into account since January 2020, including a new [DCMS](#) college, [BEIS RCAT](#) (Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Research Collaboration Advice Team offering researchers advice on how to protect their work from hostile activity) and [Trusted Research \(CPNI\)](#), so there is scope for more people to join. B Mitchell also indicated that he would be happy to collaborate on BCS's behalf on digital consultations, particularly pre-emptive submissions/feedback.

Reports, Membership Panel, item 7.1: N Berthouze reported that the actions on the revised membership criteria, industrial membership and document uploads to the website were still outstanding. The criteria are nearly complete including clarification on the question raised by D Hutchison for pending applications. One issue has arisen from an application received recently where the applicant was self-nominated. Members AGREED that applications must be supported by another member of community as this helps to clarify their suitability and their intention to contribute to UKCRC activities. This should be made clearer on the website to avoid any future confusion. **ACTION: N Berthouze**

UKCRCEC meeting held on 9 March 2021

Matters arising 9 March 2021, item 4: Chairs report Consultations with govt depts – action on this item had got as far as forming a Working Group, at which point member's time was overtaken by the REF. D Hutchison reported that the WG, which will look at how UKCRC can engage with government departments starting with NCSC, comprises C Johnson, D Hutchison, D De Roure, A Irons, Chris Hankin and Anthony Finkelstein. The intention is to convene the first meeting at end of 2021/beginning of 2022. In response to a question from B Mitchell, D Hutchison indicated that plan is for the WG scope to be aligned with BCS and IET activities in this area and that CPHC has a role too.

4. CHAIR'S REPORT

Members received and noted the report. The Chair reported that as well as welcoming M Fisher and A Gordon as new Exec members, J Xu was also welcomed back for his second term of office.

Response to Informatics Curriculum Framework from UKCRC and BCS Communities in the UK – Informatics Europe (IE) had been in contact over the summer, specifically the National Informatics Association (NIA) which holds useful workshops with international bodies including UKCRC and CPHC and their counterparts across Europe to discuss issues for informatics at school. The UK is ahead in this due to CAS, but it is important to improve standards across Europe. UKCRC was asked to comment on the Framework for researchers in different countries, following which J Hillston and A Irons had circulated requests for comment and feedback and the paper attached to the Chair's report contains the response.

EPSRC Review of Doctoral Education – the [link in the report](#) provides more information and also includes dates of the webinars planned for presenting the results of the review.

5. CONSULTATIONS & SUBMISSIONS

Members received and noted the report. C Johnson referred to the [Trusted Research Guidance for Academia](#) mentioned in the chat, which aims to support the integrity of the system of international research collaboration, vital to the continued success of the UK's research and innovation sector and noted that there is a limit to what can be shared publicly on this. It will be important for academics to get involved, eg young researchers that have been badly impacted by the Huawei issue. There will be new ways for researchers to engage with government now more than just consultations and it will be great to involve UKCRC more the process is opening up. J Dracott agreed that it will be critical to have input from academics, noting that it is not about stopping working with international partners as this is crucial for continued success but that this is done in a secure manner, ensuring that nothing unexpected occurs further down the line. Work is underway with the Centre for the Protection of National Infrastructure (CPNI) on the guidance and it will be useful for this group to pave the way for conversations with the community.

B Mitchell noted that for consultations it is a complicated landscape and not very joined up. DCMS, BEIS and DfE have their own opinions, it is fragmented and one of challenges is

engaging with people that have the right levers. An example is the question of which all party parliamentary groups are the right ones to engage with on social media.

D Hutchison flagged that the new Consultations WG would also look to understand the landscape, who does what and how they interact and asked if J Dracott would be interested in contributing. J Dracott was happy to collaborate on this and agreed it was fragmented and that there are different ways of engaging, even within a government department. D Hutchison will add J Dracott to the WG membership. **ACTION: D Hutchison**

C Johnson suggested that if the Policy Engagement workshop is held in January, it might be possible to secure a CPNI speaker. J Dracott also noted that the National Science and Technology Council, chaired by the PM and overseen by Patrick Vallance, has been charged with bringing together the strands of strategy across government and he will be happy to report back to UKCRC on this at the next meeting in March 2022.

K Jones joined the meeting during this item

6. RESEARCH FUNDING AND POLICY

6.1 EPSRC Update

Members received and noted the report. J Dracott reported that there may be something about Trusted Research in the Spending Review (27 Oct). It is likely that only the top line UKRI budget will be published with more details to follow in January 2022 but the top line information may indicate the direction of travel.

It is getting more difficult to get reviewers to undertake peer reviews at the moment and J Dracott asked members to bear with them for reviewing grants timelines as they are likely to take longer. A Blandford raised the issue of short deadlines and how funding bodies can make it easier for respondents and reviewers by raising the value and ensuring that making a response is a higher priority. Short timescales make it impossible especially during REF.

E Robinson suggested that a small change in the process could make a big difference. In the past, financial motivation had been considered, but this does not solve the problem and ends up moving money around the system to no-one's advantage. Other value/benefits might help such as recognition that reviewers could use when seeking opportunities. K Jones suggested that if someone contributed reviews, their own applications could be expedited. This might be hard to implement but would be a good reward for contributing.

D De Roure joined the meeting during this item

7. REPORTS

7.1 Membership Panel – members received and noted the report (see [item 3](#) above).

7.2 International Matters

Informatics Europe (IE) – J Xu reported that he had attended a few National Informatics Association (NIA) annual meetings, as mentioned in [item 4](#) above. The 2021 meeting was on the day after the Exec meeting with the purpose of sharing best practice on informatics research and education, which J Xu could not attend due to teaching commitments.

Members received the paper 'Open citations: an open letter to publishers of research in Informatics'. One of the meeting topics was the open availability of research publications to improve assessment exercises and policy decision making at different levels of government. J Xu asked members if they would be willing for UKCRC to support and sign the open letter.

After a short discussion, members AGREED that the letter of support should be signed by UKCRC and J Xu undertook to take this forward with IE offline. **ACTION: J Xu**

International Federation for Information Processing (IFIP) – there was no written report and A Irons had sent his apologies.

7.4 CPHC – E Robinson reported that Sally Fincher had run a special project grants for teaching in September and [five awards had been made](#) to HE institutions across the UK. There will be another round in 6 months time. E Robinson expressed his thanks to both J Hillston and A Blandford for their collaboration as UKCRC Chairs to the CPHC Committee and the wider community.

7.5 BCS Academy – B Mitchell reported that some progress had been made in the BCS academic accreditation review. This is a fundamental appraisal led by Paul Martynenko who has invited advice from a wide range of stakeholders. BCS has a duty to offer accreditation to HE institutions, while supporting professionalism for undergraduates. There are a number of recommendations which are now being implemented and the good news is that, unlike the follow up to Shadbolt, the recommendations are embedded in the BCS business strategy with proper resourcing including two full time dedicated staff members. One of the aims is to support students as they become members, and implement this *with* the community, students, academics (etc) rather than imposing it *on* them.

Other items to report are that a major report on the four nations computing education landscape is about to be published, which hopefully will be useful for the DfE as well as others. A BCS staff member is engaging with the Software Sustainability Institute, helping them to look to add value. A new Special Interest Group has been established to support the digital divide, working with the IET. On the policy side, BCS is systematically engaging with DCMS, the Cabinet Office and other government departments and getting better at feeding views in, preferably pre-emptively as mentioned earlier. Three representatives will be attending COP26, to encourage primary school children to engage with politicians about their views. B Mitchell seconded E Robinson's thanks to J Hillston and A Blandford for their work as UKCRC Chairs.

7.6 IET report – Members noted that Michelle Busson had replaced Andrew Rylah as the IET representative. M Busson and A Kotb had sent apologies but A Blandford reported on the latest situation with the website following a recent email exchange. There are still a few issues to resolve, one of which is merging the two versions of the FAQs and ensuring this is easy to maintain and another, a request from the IET for a PDF image for an archived Grand Challenge report [*post meeting note: image question now resolved*]. As A Blandford was stepping down from the Exec Committee, members were asked to consider volunteering for the website/content role, which entails ensuring that the content remains up to date and consistent with policy/updates to project UKCRC interest and mission, information on consultations and membership and ensuring it is all coherent (see [item 9.2](#) below).

N Berthouze reported that she will finalise the membership criteria and rationalise the FAQs. **ACTION: N Berthouze**

8. MENTORING PROGRAMME FOR COMPUTER SCIENCE RESEARCHERS IN THE UK

A Gordon introduced this item which had been triggered because researchers had little access to mentoring in the programming language community. There do not appear to be any researcher mentoring schemes in the UK, although the IET offers mentoring as part of registration (although there is no mention of research) and BCS is involved in developing teaching mentoring for new HE lecturers.

This seems a worthwhile service to offer, but on the other hand people are very busy and UKCRC is voluntary. It would need administrative support and one possibility could be to tap into Microsoft Research to help on a SEED basis. It might be worth thinking how it could be scaled up and who to target (post docs), whether it is relevant to UKCRC's mission or a duplication of something already happening.

E Robinson agreed that there is a need for better mentoring throughout the sector. At the CPHC *Chair in 10 years* workshops run over the last few years, it was clear that there was demand, especially from early career academics. Even senior academics value conversations on their career direction. Not sure which organisation would be best to co-ordinate this as it could be quite fragmented. K Jones echoed this, in that there are local schemes delivered by other organisations, and we would not want dilution of effort. The right approach needs to be worked out resulting in a gold standard scheme with perceived value.

D Hutchison noted that many HE institutions have formal/informal mentoring. We could learn from what some HEIs do and highlight best practice for others that could be used. Members were not aware of any mutual co-operation between institutions on this. There was a question of timing: transitional trigger points (eg, for new staff) or when individuals feel they need mentoring.

The Chair thanked members for a helpful discussion, concluding that there is an interest and appetite for this, not for running it (as resources are limited) but understanding the landscape and offering advice. Further conversations would be helpful. A Gordon undertook to talk to Alastair Irons about the BCS work in this area and come back to the next meeting with a proposal for the next step. **ACTION: A Gordon**

9. COMMITTEE ROLES

9.1 **Annual election of Chairperson** – it was agreed that this item would be dealt with offline. *[Post meeting note: the UKRC Executive Committee voted unanimously to elect K Jones as UKCRC Chair]*

9.2 **Other Committee roles** – it was agreed that this would also be dealt with offline. Secretariat to circulate details of each role and invite Exec members to volunteer for the vacant positions of UKCRC observer on CPHC Committee and Communications/website content. **ACTION: Secretariat**
[post meeting note: D De Roure volunteered for the communications/website content role]

10. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

There were no items of AOB. Members thanked J Hillston for her hard work during the three years of her term of office as Chair.

AGM

Friday 3 December 2021 (14:00-15:00) – Online

COMMITTEE MEETINGS FOR 2022 (11:00-13:00)

Tuesday 8 March – Online

Tuesday 7 June – Online

***Tuesday 25 October** – BCS Offices, London

AGM

Friday 2 December (14:00-15:00) – Online

*to be co-located with CPHC Committee meeting if possible

NB: F2F/online format TBC; BCS and IET rooms subject to availability on these dates