UK COMPUTING RESEARCH COMMITTEE

Minutes of the 56th meeting of the UK Computing Research Executive Committee on Tuesday 9 March 2021 at 11:00, held online

PRESENT

Jane Hillston (Chair)	Ann Blandford	David De Roure
David Hutchison	Kevin Jones	Jie Xu

BY INVITATION

Edmund Robinson (CPHC)	James Dracott (EPSRC)	Alastair Irons (BCS Academy)
Rhys Perry (EPSRC)	Andrew Rylah (IET)	Ahmed Kotb (IET)

IN ATTENDANCE
Maxine Leslie (BCS)

APOLOGIES

Chris Johnson	m.c. schraefel
Bashar Nuseibeh	Bill Mitchell (BCS alternate)

1. WELCOME AND APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

The Chair welcomed Members and apologies were received as above.

2. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

The minutes of the meeting held on Tuesday 27 October 2020 were APPROVED and are now ready for transfer to the UKCRC website. *[post meeting note: action complete]*

3. MATTERS ARISING

UKCRCEC meeting held on 27 October 2020

Matters arising 30 June 2020, Item 4: Discussions with NCSC – It was agreed that a number of the actions from the meeting on 27 October 2020 could be merged with a new action to form a small group to consider consultations by topic, and present Anthony Finkelstein and other CSAs with a plan for engaging with (e.g.) NCSC and DCMS. It would further help if group members could help to support C Johnson with the consultation role to avoid over-burdening one person. It was noted that Anthony Finkelstein will step down from his National Security CSA role in June 2021. It was also noted that NCSC only engages with UKCRC on digital skills. A Irons reported that the NCSC is rumoured to be looking at the accreditation of cyber security programmes and he would be happy to join in with this aspect.

It was agreed that the initial group would be Chris Johnson, David Hutchison, Dave de Roure, and Alastair Irons, with the intention of asking Chris Hankin if he will also join.

ACTION: D Hutchison

For the directory of expertise, it would help to encourage more members to complete this (it was acknowledged that the 'areas of expertise' form is sent to new members for completion (although this is optional). One option is to re-circulate the form to existing members and it was agreed that action should be taken to consider how the directory listing can be enhanced for further consideration by the Exec Committee meeting. **ACTION: Chair**

<u>Matters arising 10 March 2020, item 4: Chairs report RS Sectional Committee nominations</u> – volunteers are being sought to join the working group, preferably from outside of Edinburgh and UCL. Volunteers do not need to be Executive Committee members, but the chair does (see item 4.3 below). The working group comprises five members that collectively brainstorm using Google documents. The deadline is July for nominations.

4.   CHAIR'S REPORT

Members received and noted the report.

4.1   Leicester University and future responses *[item 4.2 on agenda]*

The Chair indicated that she had not so far heard from the Vice Chancellor of the University of Leicester in response to the letter about the restructuring and threatened redundancies. [Note: a response, similar to the CPHC response, was received after the meeting] E Robinson indicated that a response to CPHC had been received, which looked like a slightly tailored form response. It did seem to indicate a softening of the line in that although people were at risk, many will be retained. There was concern though at the poor treatment of colleagues, leading to reputational damage and potential difficulty in the institution's recruitment in future, particularly in the areas of AI and data science which are difficult areas to retain experts in, as it is. This had been included for discussion to see if there is anything more that can be done by the Exec Committee, such as a website statement or raising it with the union.

K Jones indicated that originally the discussion related to the short term impact, but maybe the longer term impact on society of cutting down on research in this fundamental area may be detrimental. It might help to publish an article via the website highlighting the historical evidence of where this sort of action has not worked out well.

A Blandford reminded the Exec that impact case studies were published following the last REF. Although this is not the time to repeat this, it could be put on the agenda following the publication of the REF results next year. The Chair asked if something interim could be organised sooner than this.

A Irons reported that Paul Fletcher had written a letter from BCS, pointing out that the department at Leicester offered programmes that had long been accredited by BCS and the importance of benchmarking the curriculum, emphasising the link to research and the importance of continuing to address the skills gap and graduate shortages. A reply had not been received.

D Hutchison asked if the Andy Pitt (Cambridge) group letter had been published in the Times. BCS had been unable to support a public statement and The Times had suggested the Times Higher Education, but by then the moment had passed. The Chair undertook to go back to the Andy Pitt group to let them know that UKCRC would welcome a statement that could be published on the UKCRC website. **ACTION: Chair**

4.2   Membership criteria for UKCRC *[item 4.1 on agenda]*

The Chair reiterated the background to this item which is a follow up to the exercise to identify potential industrial members. N Berthouze reported that the Membership Panel had met a few weeks before to start discussions on which membership criteria are appropriate to attract different member profiles and properly represent the diverse senior research community. It had been agreed that more flexibility was required to avoid constraints, and make membership possible and more attractive to industrialists or those that straddle the divide between academia and industry.

N Berthouze confirmed that the Panel was reviewing a CV that D Hutchison had sent through and would be keen to look at the applications from further recommendations. The requirement for a first degree was discussed and it was noted that there have been Executive Committee members without a first degree.

K Jones asked whether the criteria should be taken as indicative or absolute. Sometimes it was more helpful to look more holistically at qualifications and experience eg, if an applicant has the right level of seniority, it may make their first degree or the subject of their first degree irrelevant, it is more helpful to consider the contribution that they can make as a member. It was further noted that the membership list is visible and gives good examples of the kinds of background that fit.

J Hillston suggested reversing the current order of the criteria and adding something about personal attributes such as a willingness to enter into meaningful discussions within UKCRC. E Robinson indicated the importance of framing it inclusively by evidencing the positives to attract members rather than suggesting exclusivity.

N Berthouze thanked everyone for the ideas and suggestions and invited members to continue to send through other possible indicators that could be added into the discussions. **ACTION: Members**

N Berthouze undertook to write a proposal for revising the membership criteria to take into account applications from researchers from industry, or from those that are between academia and industry, for consideration by the Membership Panel and Executive Committee. **ACTION: N Berthouze**

A query was raised about whether there was a mechanism for leaving UKCRC membership and it was confirmed that there was currently no procedure for this.

4.3 RS Nomination Working Group

As reported at previous meetings, for the last couple of years, a small working group has existed to consider potential nominees for RS Fellowship through Section Committee SC0, for passing to the chair of SC0 (Steve Furber) each July. The Chair has led this working group for the last two years but is looking for a volunteer to take on the role this year and K Jones volunteered. The Chair thanked K Jones.

4.4 Obituaries and the new webpage

It was noted, as above, that there are no exit criteria for UKCRC members. As a related issue, during the website migration the obituaries section of the Member page had been removed. The Chair asked whether it was a good idea to re-instate this. K Jones suggested it was interesting from UKCRC's perspective to show influence over time, as some late members had been very influential in their field and this adds to the gravitas of UKCRC. It was noted that the previous obituary entries were linked to external webpages which are not routinely checked that they are still available. There are inconsistencies in that not all member deaths are reported back and if it is on a voluntary basis there is often a bias against female obituaries being published.

The Chair undertook to work with the Secretariat/IET on whether a process can be put in place to link to obituaries for a year and then taken down. **ACTION: Chair/M Leslie/A Rylah**

5. CONSULTATIONS & SUBMISSIONS

Members received and noted the report. The workshop on Policy Engagement on 15 January went really well and it is hoped that this will be run again as it was oversubscribed. It will be

good to build on this by contacting those that took part and encouraging them to participate in consultations. The Chair recorded her thanks to C Johnson for the workshop and his continued work leading UKCRC's responses to consultations.

6.   RESEARCH FUNDING AND POLICY

6.1   EPSRC Update

See the appended report, which had been circulated to the Executive Committee and the full UKCRC membership subsequent to the meeting.

7.   REPORTS

7.1   Membership Panel

N Berthouze introduced this item, indicating that there had been one member approval since the last meeting (Subramanian Ramamoorthy, Edinburgh). M Leslie undertook to send the link to the spreadsheet list of potential industrial contacts/companies to invite to apply, so that this broader context can be considered when looking at the membership criteria *[post meeting note: action complete]*.

7.2   Open Publishing Working Group – nothing to report.

7.3   International Matters

Informatics Europe (IE) – the Chair indicated that planning was underway within IE for an in-person meeting in October 2021 but the venue was to be confirmed. One of the workshop themes will look at barriers to women in informatics, including careers for those that are between academia and industry. Any Members seeking further information to let the Chair know.

International Federation for Information Processing (IFIP) – A Irons reported that BCS was looking to rebuild the relationship with IFIP, of which it is the UK member. IFIP has set up a 60th Anniversary Committee which includes BCS representation and work is currently underway to see how BCS can more actively engage in the IFIP Technical Committees.

7.4   CPHC

E Robinson reported that a follow up to the 2020 series of diversity workshops had been organised and chaired by Adrian Friday (Lancaster University) and its main output was a suggestion to support institutions in considering practice outside of the Athena SWAN process, particularly in issues of exclusion. Although the current pressure of work was raised as an issue, future action is being looked into.

The 2021 online AGM is about to be announced, where Committee member elections will be held. If Executive Committee members are aware of anyone who may be interested in contributing to the work of the Committee, E Robinson invited them to get in touch as it would be good to have a balance of research- and teaching-intensive institutions on the Committee, so that the whole community can be represented.

It was noted that there was an EPSRC workshop on the afternoon of this UKCRC Exec meeting for community groups adopting doctoral training groups, which the Chair was intending to attend. Comments had been sought in advance.

7.5 BCS Academy

A Irons reported that he had been delighted to welcome K Jones as the new UKCRC representative on the BCS Academy of Computing Board. Executive Committee Members will be invited to attend the next Academy Board meeting on 5 May to discuss how both bodies can work more closely together.

The review of BCS accreditation is ongoing with the current stage being finalising data collection. The Academy is working closely with colleagues in BCS on the membership offer, including a new offer for all students. A subgroup of the Board is looking at programmes for new computing academics (CPD/mentoring/buddying). This is gathering pace, with the pilot sessions being oversubscribed.

A wider review of diversity is being undertaken with an external expert consultant, including an investigation into reasons for people not putting themselves forward for awards and prizes. Members are welcome to help if interested.

Discussions are underway with E Robinson and Iain Phillips about the Distinguished Dissertations (DisDis) Committee and process. The DisDis Chair is looking to expand the dissertation review group and has messaged the CPHC membership to progress this. Anyone interested should contact Iain Phillips.

7.6 IET report

A Kotb reported that a 6G for policy makers guide had been launched including a focus on big society challenges (see the IET website). There is a 10 year strategy of which digital futures is part including trust and there are a couple of panel members from big tech firms. Information is available in the form of podcasts which can be circulated. Every 8 weeks a newsletter is released to 155k members of the IET and if the Exec has any items to be included, to let A Kotb or A Rylah know.

A Rylah added that the IET is in the process of setting up working groups with a computer focus (eg, engineering safety, complex systems) and is looking for computing/coding contacts to become involved. A Rylah will liaise with M Leslie to get an invitation to get involved out to UKCRC Members.   **ACTION: A Rylah/M Leslie**

8.   COMMITTEE ROLES

The Chair asked for a volunteer for Communications/website content aspects as this had not been agreed at the last meeting. In particular, the website needs content and Luc Moreau had been looking into whether interviews every couple of months could be added, to have something more interesting to get more visitors to the website. A Blandford volunteered to take this on and work with A Rylah until the end of her term of office in November 2021. The Chair thanked A Blandford. M Leslie undertook to forward the most up to date version of Luc Moreau's plan *[post meeting note: action complete]*.

9.   ANY OTHER BUSINESS

There were no items of AOB, the Chair thanked attendees and closed the meeting at 12:48.

COMMITTEE MEETINGS FOR 2021 *Commencing 11:00 unless otherwise stated*

*Tuesday 29 June – Online (includes a joint meeting with CPHC)
Tuesday 26 October – IET Offices, London (TBC/subject to availability)

AGM
Friday 3 December 2021 at 14:00 – Online

EPSRC/UKRI Update for UKCRC March 2021

Further action to support doctoral students affected by Covid-19

UKRI has announced further action to support PhD students whose studies are being affected by COVID-19. £7 million funding that was not used for extensions for students in their final year will now be available for UKRI-funded students in other years. UKRI is also consulting on giving grant holders greater flexibility, so that they can fund further extensions for its funded students if this is required. Professor Dame Ottoline Leyser has written an open letter explaining how this, together with £11 million in new block grants to English universities, is supporting doctoral students.

UKRI publishes ethnicity analysis of funding applicants and awardees

Detailed ethnicity data for UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) funding applicants and awardees, published for the first time, highlights disparities between different ethnic groups. The data analyses published today form part of ongoing work at UKRI to increase equality diversity and inclusion in the research and innovation system through effective, evidenced interventions. The publication of the data is an important part of our commitment to identify and address issues within the funding system and alongside the report we have published an updated policy statement on our actions.

EPSRC publishes detailed ethnicity data

Data published recently outlines the underrepresentation of ethnic minority researchers in the EPSRC's portfolio. Addressing this underrepresentation is a key priority for EPSRC and UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) and the data will inform ongoing work that supports this goal. EPSRC will also engage with its community to understand the perspectives of ethnic minority members of the engineering and physical sciences (EPS) community and the factors that contribute to underrepresentation.

EPSRC appoints 16 Strategic Advisory Network members

The EPSRC has appointed 16 new members of its Strategic Advisory Network (SAN). The SAN provides the EPSRC Executive with strategic advice to assist in developing, implementing and modifying plans, and to make appropriate recommendations to EPSRC's Council.

AI review: Transforming our world with AI

UKRI has published its AI review 'Transforming our world with AI', which sets out UKRI's view of the opportunities for research and innovation in AI – artificial intelligence – in the UK. In it we set out our aspirations for supporting transformational activities, and for working with our partners to place the UK in a strong position to realise the vast potential benefits of AI. The UKRI AI review outlines how we can support world-leading AI research & innovation, and ensure that the UK has the right environment for those researchers and innovators to thrive.

Technician Commitment: UKRI Action Plan

UKRI has published an action plan outlining how it will champion the Technician Commitment. The plan sets out UKRI's expectation that the research organisations it invests in recognise and value their technically skilled people and nurture them in reaching their full potential. More information here.

Calls:

- **UKRI Trustworthy Autonomous Systems programme: responsibility:** Apply for funding to support novel and creative multidisciplinary research on responsibility for autonomous systems. Your proposed project should integrate researchers from different disciplines, particularly from social sciences, arts and humanities. £3 million funding is available for up to 4 grants. Closing date 13 May 2021.
- **Cross-cutting research for exascale software and algorithms:** Apply for funding to research issues that impact the development of exascale software and algorithms. Up to £5million is available for up to 5 awards. Closing date 15 April 2021.
- **Access to high performance computing:** Apply for access to HPC services to support any research in EPSRC's remit. Closing date 30 April 2021.
- **Pre-announcement: business and academia prosperity partnership:** Apply for funding to support an established research partnership between business and academic institutions. The industrial partners must match the funding provided by EPSRC for the partnership. Opening date TBC.
- All UKRI funding opportunities can be accessed through the funding finder: https://www.ukri.org/opportunity/