

The INSTITUTION of ANALYSTS & PROGRAMMERS

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INSTITUTION NEWSLETTER

September 1991

Having completed the 1991 Directory of Members just in time for the Summer break, we had been anticipating a somewhat quieter time at the Institution office. These hopes have proved ill founded. I think analysts and programmers must sit on the beach reading computer magazines. Large numbers of them evidently read our advertisements, and though smaller numbers actually join the Institution they still make an amazing amount of work.

But we have managed to get ahead with a few other things. Most notably we have recruited member Alan Dickinson to project manage the forthcoming conference. Alan has professional experience as a conference organiser, and he outlines his plans later in this newsletter. We would not have got as far as this but for the advice and suggestions for papers from a lot of other members, all of which have been much appreciated. I hope there will be space somewhere in our plans for everyone who has offered help already to participate in some way.

The Institution is also looking for someone who would be able to assist in the role of Honorary Press Officer, not only for the conference but also in a more general sense. The job itself should not be too demanding, but we do need someone with experience who knows his way round the technical press. We want to start winning our fair share of the free publicity that is available; we also want investigate the possibility of organising a proper quarterly publication of our own.

MICHAEL C. RYAN Director General

BRANCH ACTIVITIES

Two members have written recently to express an interest in organising local branches of the Institution. Derek Rowlands lives in Tasmania, a part of the world where our members are not exactly packed shoulder to shoulder, but where they make up for it with enthusiasm. Derek has written to all the Australian members, and we hope to receive a progress report from him shortly.

Jonathan Tucker is based in Bournemouth, potentially much more fertile territory for starting a branch. We must have at least a hundred members within an hour's drive. Jonathan also is formulating his plans, and no doubt he would be glad to know of anyone reasonably close at hand who might be interested to help.

The Institution would be pleased to hear from anyone in these, or indeed in any other areas, who would be willing either to take the lead in organising a local Branch, or to lend a hand on a regular basis. It would be our policy not to try to impose a system of branches on the membership, but to try to encourage the growth of local groups wherever there is a demand.

EDUCATIONAL MATTERS

In June we told you of the efforts that are being made to strengthen links with the colleges through an extended system of Accreditation. In the past the Institution has approved courses and examinations on an ad-hoc basis, the Council taking the view that these matters should have the benefit of being judged on their individual merits. Unfortunately this cannot continue. Now that the Institution is becoming more widely known, the Council receives applications for recognition from colleges in all parts of the world, and some formal guidelines are essential.

In recent years the government has been promoting a new system for National Vocational Qualifications. It is anticipated that this Institution, along with our Accredited colleges in the UK will ultimately participate in the scheme. When this happens it will mean that in order for a degree or diploma to be acceptable as qualifying the holder for entry to the Institution, it will also have to be recognised at an appropriate level by the National Council for Vocational Qualifications. If it were then made mandatory for every candidate for election to pass such an examination, Membership of the Institution would itself become in effect a National Vocational Qualification.

While this might seem an attractive to existing members of the Institution, it raises a number of questions. It is hard to see how the Institution could accredit colleges overseas, outside the net of the NCVQ. Overseas applicants would have to sit examinations organised in the UK either by one of the UK Accredited Colleges or by the Institution itself. Inevitably this would make membership of the Institution much less accessible for the majority of overseas candidates - quite the reverse of the Council's present policy.

But the more serious problem would lie closer to home. At the moment anyone who can convince the Council that he is a competent and professional programmer or analyst can become a full Member of this Institution. To get in you need experience and you need to be a professional: you do not necessarily need to pass examinations. The Council believe they have got their priorities the right way round if the Institution is to become known for the quality and professionalism of its membership. We need to get good people into the Institution, not devise rules to keep them out.

We do not wish to denigrate the value of formal education: in our view it is the easy way to acquire the all-round technical grounding that any competent professional needs. But it is a fact that in our profession, more perhaps than most others, there are a lot of people occupying top positions, whose professional competence is beyond question, who have not taken time out from their careers to pass examinations. These people must have a place in the IAP.

If the Institution is to retain credibility its entry requirements must meet recognisable standards, and it is in every member's interests that we achieve this. But we must not lose sight of the fact that this is an organisation for professionals. We do not want to get steered into a whirlpool of educational side-issues, as has happened to some other professional bodies.

One way forward which has been suggested, is that the Institution should introduce a Diploma which would be awarded to all those qualifying for entry at Graduate level. Candidates would have to pass either the Institution's own examination, an equivalent examination organised by one of the Accredited colleges, or an exempting examination. All these examinations would have to be recognised by the NCVQ. However, it would not be necessary to hold the Diploma in order to become a full Member of the Institution: the "experience" route would still be open, though standards might be raised. A second suggestion is that election to the higher grade of Fellow would only be available to those holding the Diploma or an equivalent NVQ.

We would emphasise that none of these changes, which are merely under discussion at the present time, would affect the gradings of existing members. However, we all have an interest in the future development of the Institution: it will be to our mutual advantage to ensure that it is steered in a direction that will lead to enhanced influence and prestige.

The Council would be glad to hear any views or suggestions members may have on this topic.

IAP CONFERENCE 1992

In previous letters we put forward tentative plans to hold a conference and we have had an excellent and enthusiastic response from our members. We are scheduling the event for October 1992, and it promises to be interesting, informative, and great value for money.

A lot of exciting things have happened in Information Technology over the past 10 years, and much has been written about spectacular advances in hardware and software, but little about the impact on the computer profession itself. Ever since the advent of Cobol we have read about the imminent demise of programming as we know it, and yet programmes become ever more sophisticated, and computer skills ever more in demand. We feel it is appropriate that our inaugural conference should focus on the changing role of the analyst and programmer, concentrating on the following topics:

- * Methods and Tools, such as CASE, Fourth Generation Languages, Database Systems and Object Oriented Programming
- * Quality, the significance of BS 5750, and the application of quality control methods to systems development.
- * Career Progression, the issues of training and specialisation, the effects of Open Systems on programming skills mobility, contract programming, telecommuting and offshore programming.
- * The technical and business challenges facing analysts and programmers.

Do you have something interesting to say on one of these topics? If you would like to present a short paper at the conference we would like to hear from you. Remember, we are not looking for papers which describe particular methodologies or 4GLs in detail, but for thought-provoking papers which address the question of how technology affects the role of analysts and programmers. Prospective speakers should write to the Institution and we will send you more details of requirements. Please do not send a paper at this stage.

We also need two or three people to help with some aspects of the planning and organisation of the conference. Any previous experience of organising conferences or dealing with the press will be put to good use but is not essential. More important is the enthusiasm to make this event a success, good organisational skills and a sense of humour. You will need to be available for occasional evening planning meetings which will be held in Ealing. If you would like to participate on the organising committee please send a brief note to the Institution with daytime and evening contact phone numbers as soon as possible.

ALAN DICKINSON Conference Coordinator

THE DIRECTORY

It seems that our herculean efforts to eliminate errors from the 1991 Directory of Members must have been fairly successful. Very few members wrote to notify us of major blunders, though this may just mean some of you are very polite. To those who have suffered we apologise.

However, we did notice a significant number of minor mistakes that were introduced by the scanning process. This is particularly annoying as we had spent months painstakingly eliminating errors from our database, only to have new ones introduced by the typesetters.

As a result we are giving serious thought to producing the pages ourselves next time, and the Secretary has been told to start studying DTP. At least then we will know who to blame in future.

INTRODUCTION OF DIRECT DEBITS

Over recent months a number of members have written asking if they can pay their subscriptions by direct debit. As foreshadowed in the June Newsletter, it is now likely that this facility will become available all members with UK bank accounts from the beginning of 1992.

For those to whom standing orders and direct debits seem confusingly similar, perhaps I should point out the essential difference. With a standing order you give a written instruction to your bank to make fixed payments to the IAP. With a direct debit you give the Institution authority to take variable amounts of money out of your account. Though this might seem risky, in fact it is not. The Direct Debiting Scheme is operated jointly by all the UK clearing banks; they are very choosy about who they allow to participate, and the system is subject to strict legal controls.

The big advantage of the direct debit is that it cuts down administration both for the Institution and for members. Once they have signed direct debits members need never concern themselves with payments again. If subscription rates change, due to inflation or because the member is upgraded, the Institution already has authority to make the necessary adjustment.

Even as a non-profit-making organisation the Institution needs to increase its charges from time to time, if only to keep pace with UK cost inflation. In future it is proposed to review charges every year, so as to avoid the need for the big jumps in rates that have occurred in the past. This will make no difference to members who pay by cheque: they will continue to receive reminders when their subscriptions are due, telling them how much to pay. But those who pay by standing order will find they need to adjust the order every year, unless they change to direct debits.

I would urge all UK members, and those overseas who have UK bank accounts, to transfer to the direct debit scheme as soon as it is introduced. This will be more convenient for them, and it will release Institution staff to deal with more useful matters than internal accounting. As an added inducement it is proposed to offer discounted rates for those paying by direct debit.

From 1st January, 1992, subscription rates will be increased to the following:

Companion	£50.00
Fellow	£44.00
Member	£39.00
Licentiate	£35.00
Graduate	£32.00
Associate Member	£30.00

Where a direct debiting facility is available, the Institution will draw £5.00 less than the above rates. It is not proposed to continue the differential rates for members paying by standing order. This well-meant idea has proved to be a source of confusion for members and for the Institution. However, it is hoped that those who pay by standing order now will be able to transfer to the new direct debits and thus continue to benefit from reduced subscription rates.

VIRGINIA LUCKETT Secretary