

IAPetus



Quarterly Bulletin For the Institution of
Analysts & Programmers

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In Pursuit of Excellence

As professionals we all strive to give our best in everything that we pursue.

One would therefore expect that as professionals who have chosen a career which is in a field that is ever changing that each and every one of us would agree that it is incumbent on us to explore and embrace new technologies. We ought to also continually grow our knowledge base and expand our horizons within the framework of what we do. We ought to always behave in a candid, ethical and honest manner and realise that the tasks we undertake ultimate stand for the quality of our workmanship. I don't think that is an impractical expectation and nor do I think it is unreasonable for non-technologically minded people to have these expectation about Information technologists.

The role of the analyst programmer takes on two basic mantles. There is the role of the grass root developer and the other of the code custodian. We can all relate to custodian, it is the kind of role that has received particularly high exposure in the lead up to the day of the nines and of course the century change. Custodians are the maintenance programmers that many employers regard as a necessary evil. Many new students and a great many programmers of yesteryear have taken up programming again to remedy the 'sins of the past'. Whether we like it or not, the issue has called into question the integrity and quality of the analyst-

programmer community at large. Whilst some can be forgiven for having skimmed on the digits to economise on resource usage, the fact still remains that a great deal of code was generated during a period when quite frankly it just came down to lazy programming or a 'well that's the way we always did it' approach. The prophets of gloom and doom have of course attributed the whole affair to some Machiavelian plot to bring the modern world to a grinding halt. The results are not in yet, but undoubtedly, this will have been the most expensive mistake mankind will have made to date. This will be the event of which urban legends are made and one which will remain with us for some years to come.

Commerce and Industry has learnt an expensive lesson, a lesson that regrettably seems to have made no difference whatsoever. Technology is still regarded by many as a 'must have' to maintain competitive advantage. Only a few accept that to make it work well, it needs to be managed. It cannot be managed by only those that work in that realm, it needs to be managed by the bean counters and the people who use it each and every day. We all have an expectation that when we switch on a light switch, the light will pour from the globe or tube, can we say the same about that ubiquitous machine we call a computer? I don't believe we can. There's an expectation that the blue screen of death could well descend on one's

machine today on the alignment of the digits in much the same way that oceans do strange things when the moon gets too close.

We at least know why that happens, we can't say the same about our computers.

In our rush to get the job done we have successfully produced a score of mediocre products. In our haste to appease the bleating users we've taken short cuts and economised on quality all over the place. The consequence is that we have failed to successfully achieve what we set

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The end of another year, and on the threshold stands – according to the Romans – Janus, the Two-faced God. One face looks forwards into the future and the other looks back into the past. Which way do you prefer to look?

The gloom-sayers, of course, are busy telling us that there is no future. As a webmeister I periodically get crazy e-mails declaring that the end of the world is nigh, this morning one arrived with the subject "You have two months to live". My finger got some exercise on the DELETE key!

Seriously, though, the future is

always a time of opportunity and of threat. This year, there's the uncertainty as to whether the 'Millennium Bug' will prove to be a genuine problem or so much hot air.

Hot on its heels follows further uncertainty for those of us who contract for a living – at least in the UK – as the British government tries to force through IR35, which in its present state is so hazily-worded that most contractors cannot figure out whether or not it is going to apply to them!

And opportunities? *Star Trek's* Mr Spock once said "No event is

devoid of possibilities", so maybe even the threats pose opportunity to those ready to meet them intelligently. The Internet continues to expand, there are exciting new technologies, ever bigger and ever faster machines... the mix as before. Lots of things to get involved in.

Enough of my wibble. Enjoy the holiday, and let us go forwards into whatever the future holds, ready, willing and able to make the most of whatever occurs.

Megan C. Robertson

Several people have emailed me asking why the Institution includes business skills as part of the criteria for assessing membership.

There are a number of reasons; we estimate that about half of our members are either self-employed or are contractors – in either case these skills are necessary to run the member's business – but what about the other half?

Way back, when I was employed as a programmer, I took part of an MBA degree. The managing director of the company I was working for was puzzled as I had repeatedly said that I did not want to be a manager, and asked why I was doing it. "What I want to do", I said, "is to understand the information you want, and why you want it! That makes me better prepared to offer extra information that you didn't realise we had." He thought about it, and then said that the company would assist in the funding – even though the course wasn't directly relevant to the job I was doing.

Hybrid skills are becoming more and more necessary to the practicing IT professional – they may be management or accountancy related skills, as much of the work in IT is in support of business; other people have specialist skills in areas such as engineering, banking or human resources and are able to apply their knowledge of IT to their specialist area. In addition, as one progresses up the "corporate ladder", the business and management skills become more relevant; progression up to team-leader is

going to require man-management skills and eventually the time could come when any one of our members might be expected to make a presentation to their board of directors to initiate a project.

A project is not just about the technology involved – it is also about the benefit it will bring to the business, and whether that will justify the expenses of the project. The budget planning means that someone has to understand the business' cash flow; a budget is not just about having the

money allocated, but also about having the money available when it is required. A project may also have "intangible" benefits – a web site, for example, may not directly generate revenue, but it is a "shop window" to the organisation and thus provides publicity – so an understanding of marketing and advertising is of benefit if this type of project is considered.

Finally, for many employed members, the time will come when they have to make a decision – to stay as employees, or to strike out on their own – either self-employed or as contractors. To do this, being able

to prepare a business plan, a cash-flow forecast and to understand the basics of running a business are all useful skills.

Alex Robertson
CMath CEng FIMA FBCS
FIAP MIMgt

Business and IT skills – a necessary mix?

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The Director General writes

Elsewhere in IAPetus you should find a write-up on IAP99. Trinity House is grand, but not huge. It was comfortably full with IAP members and guests, but we could have squeezed in a few more, and there seemed to be plenty left to eat and drink.

Those of you who didn't make it to the Symposium this year should be kicking yourselves. The quality of the venue, the speakers and even, so Jim Bates tells me, the beer, was not to be missed!

But all is not lost. Grab your new IAP diary now, turn to Friday, 20th October, and write down Symposium 2000. Once again the palatial halls of Trinity House will be at our disposal; an even more mind-boggling array of speakers is being courted.

Best of all, Symposium 2000 will actually cost less than previous events. The Council has decided IAP members should get subsidised places at £50 each. The price for outsiders will be £100.

The Symposium is still some way off, but before that we have something new planned. Brian White MP, one of the speakers at IAP99, has generously offered to host an IAP Dinner at the House of Commons. Most likely this will be on a weekday in April/May next

year. Even if you have seen it all before, dinner at the House is always an enjoyable experience. Particularly when Parliament is sitting you can find yourself literally rubbing shoulders with the famous.

Dinner in a private dining room is usually followed by a speaker, and Brian has undertaken to find someone involved with our industry – Patricia Hewitt's name was mentioned. (We didn't think Dawn Primarolo would be too keen to face a room full of tanked-up IT contractors!)

After the port those who wish can tour the building. There is much of interest to be seen and a great sense of history. If the House has risen you can enter the debating chambers and stand where Churchill, Maggie and all those other famous people have stood.

The details still have to be fixed but it would be helpful to get an early indication of likely numbers. Members and their partners will get priority, with guests if there is space.

Before becoming MP for Milton Keynes two years ago Brian White was a contract programmer. When you are working in the field you know what's going on day by day: when you leave it you can

very quickly lose touch. The Institution has an opportunity to ensure that the real facts of life on the street for IT professionals penetrate through to government.

For example, we've all heard the scare stories, but what will be the actual effect of IR35, in whatever form it finally ends up, on members' incomes, companies, and work opportunities? Write and tell us of your experiences – the facts, not the theories. Brian needs to be kept abreast of everything that affects life in the IT business.

Prophets of Y2k doom notwithstanding, the future is bright for the IAP. Tremendous support from my small staff and solid backing from a talented and dedicated Council, have put us firmly on track for many good things in the coming months.

Perhaps it would be optimistic to hope many of you will enjoy a particularly peaceful New Year this time. But I am confident that Year 2000 will be a prosperous one for IT professionals, with many big companies pressing the start button on major plans, once the cloud of the millennium bug has passed over. My best wishes to you all.

Mike Ryan

The IAP has a governing Council of fifteen elected members. Each member serves for three years, five members retiring and five new ones being elected every year.

five vacancies). You can nominate yourself, or get a friend to do it. Just write to the Director General saying who you are and who you wish to nominate.

other benefit or money's worth from the Institution".

Members are expected to attend full meetings of the Council four times a year. Currently these are held on Saturdays at the Anchor Inn, Bankside, London SE1, following a buffet lunch. Between meetings the business of the Council continues by telephone and email.

If the Institution is to maximise the usefulness to the busy working members who own it, it needs guidance from those members at Council level.

A place on the Council need not involve a lot of work – it is your expertise we need. But there are also opportunities to become more involved in activities that happen to interest you.

Council Elections *Nominations for 2000*

We are now calling for nominations for the five Council places that will become available on 1st June 2000. Only Fellows and Members can stand for the Council, but all members (except Students) are entitled to make nominations and to vote in the election.

Each member can nominate up to five people (because there will be

The deadline for nominations is 31st January 2000.

Those thinking of joining the Council should be aware that the IAP's Memorandum of Association states "... no member of its Council of Management or Governing Body shall be appointed to any office of the Institution paid by salary or fees or receive any remuneration or

The Annual Symposium of the Institution of Analysts and Programmers held at Trinity House, Tower Hill, London, on 18th September 1999

On Saturday 18th September just under a hundred members and friends of the IAP met in the splendid Georgian surroundings of Trinity House, for the Institution's IAP99 Symposium. Trinity House is the headquarters of the Corporation that runs Britain's lighthouses. This splendid mansion, constructed by Samuel Wyatt in 1796, is on a prime City site overlooking the Thames and the Tower of London. With amazing foresight Wyatt positioned it right next to the future Tower Hill underground station.

Chairman for the event was Brian Oakley, a Past President of the BCS. Brian has always worked at the leading edge of computing. He was one of the pioneers of Bletchley Park: now, some fifty years later, he chairs the European Pathfinder Project for the European Institute of Quantum Computing.

After registration, a cup of coffee and a cake, the day's official business began. Tony Sale, perhaps the best known of the remaining Bletchley pioneers, is the man widely credited with saving what remains of the original building and its memorabilia. Sadly the early wartime computers were destroyed on Churchill's orders. Nevertheless, Tony explained that he was actually rebuilding Colossus, perhaps the most famous machine of them all, from scratch. To do this, working entirely from fading photographs and the fifty-year-old memories of elderly colleagues struck most of his audience as almost impossible. However, for the cream of Britain's codebreakers it seems the impossible merely takes a little longer.

Early work at Bletchley combined the elements of computing, communications and cryptography – a synergy that continues to this day. But how different it could have been if, instead of destroying machines and burying huge leaps of insight under the Official Secrets Act,

Britain had capitalised on their commercial possibilities. This was the message underlying the presentation by Hamish Carmichael. Honorary Secretary of the Computer Conservation Society, Hamish revealed a fascinating

insight to the birth pangs of the commercial computer industry, sadly clouded by Britain's lost opportunities, and failure to capitalise fully on those that remained.

The next speaker was Steve Ash, a specialist in OO training and consultancy. Having been brought right up to date by the previous

IAP99

speaker, the audience was somewhat bemused to hear that OO, still regarded by some as avant-garde, is "really nothing new". Steve tried hard to keep his enthusiasm for OO in check, carefully balancing his presentation.

The last speaker before lunch was Anthony Finkelstein, Professor of Software Engineering at University College London. His topic was very current indeed, but instead of a re-iteration of Y2k problems, delegates were treated to a devastating condemnation of Y2k hype. Though many IAP members have enjoyed riding the wave of extra work Y2k has generated, nobody was keen to argue with Professor Finkelstein's assertion that the whole thing has been ludicrously over-hyped. Armageddon may still strike on January 1st, but the Professor was able to demonstrate that most forecasts of doom cannot survive the simplest logical scrutiny. All this was put across in a most humorous and persuasive style, leaving even those delegates with a vested interest in Y2k problems somewhat disarmed and ready for lunch.

A fork buffet was served in the adjoining library, a splendid room with a direct view onto the Tower. Delegates were able to circulate around a number of small exhibition stands that had been set up during the morning. These were intended to publicise the free services available to members of the IAP, and the commercial firms who help to make such services possible. Firms represented included Browne Jacobson Solicitors, Wheawill & Sudworth Accountants, and Blackmore Professional Risks. The Institution's Recognised Recruitment Agencies were represented by Career Group. QA Training and Computer Forensics also had stands.

Lunch could have gone on all afternoon, but eventually delegates

were persuaded back for the next session, which dealt with Electronic Commerce. Brian White MP, the Honorary Treasurer of PITCOM (the Parliamentary IT Committee of which the IAP is a member), outlined the government's current thinking on the legislative framework that will be needed if electronic commerce is to achieve its full potential.

Linda Craney immediately moved the discussion into the commercial arena. Linda is an authority on the Internet and its potential for commerce. Delegates were treated to a swift tour of a number of sites, Linda illustrating her point that Internet trading is nothing to fear, and that it's coming anyway. But the companies who are most successfully using the Internet today are using it not just to augment their existing business, but to redefine the way business is done. Auction pricing, for example, is an exciting new development that only the Internet has made possible. And while discounted pricing is perhaps expected on the Internet, this need not mean a reduction in service. Internet technology can offer customers a higher level of personalised service, as well as a tighter integration with related products.

It was left to Mark Snelgrove, the next speaker and an Associate with Browne Jacobson Solicitors, to apply a gentle brake to delegates' newly found enthusiasm for Internet trading. Mark pointed out that while most people are aware of the security issues, net trading has also raised important contractual problems. At what point in a purely electronic transaction is a contract actually made? How relevant is the current edifice of consumer protection legislation to this new scenario? And how do you bring any kind of legal discipline to trades that can shuttle across judicial borders in milliseconds? Mark did not have any simple answers, but he was able to outline current thinking on some of these issues and at least make delegates aware that there are major legal problems to be resolved.

The next speaker was Eddie Bleasdale, the Chief Executive Officer of Netproject. Eddie was responsible for the design and development of Europe's first Unix computers, and the essence of his message was that only Unix, and now Linux, can provide the reliability and security necessary for net commerce to prosper. Eddie impressed delegates with his authoritative grasp of

"delegates were treated to a devastating condemnation of Y2k hype"

The Education Officer writes

Autumn is the season of mists, mellow fruitfulness and university careers fairs. I seem to have spent most of my time at the latter, so I haven't had much time for harvesting. Although I suppose it's possible to harvest students.

In any event, it's been a fruitful activity. (I think I'll stop flogging this metaphorical dead horse now.)

Let me explain. Many of today's computing degrees are four year programmes in which students spend their third year on an extended industrial placement. In fact, they're usually employed for a total of 48 weeks. This represents a valuable opportunity both for students and employers.

Clearly, the students get a year's real world experience. (In fact, by the time they graduate, this will have been augmented by a final year project that, most often, is carried out in response to a specific company need, so their first employer after graduation can expect them to have about 14 months effective experience.)

But the placement employer gets some very tangible advantages too. First, the students already have two years' IT focused post-school training. Second, they're enthusiastic (especially if my contacts with them over the last couple of months are anything to go by). Third, they'll bring some aspects of current research with them. Fourth, they won't expect to be paid the earth. Fifth, the employer has the chance

to influence that final year project and get even more value out of the link. And sixth, a placement employer gets the opportunity to have a very long look at someone who might apply for a 'real' job in the not too distant future.

Of course, students can't be expected to hit the ground running. An employer needs to channel that enthusiasm and there are almost certain to be some training implications, given that, however experienced any new employee is, he or she won't know the minutiae of the employer's business.

All in all, then, there are huge advantages on both sides of the equation. So we started to think about how best to introduce student members of the IAP to established members who might be in a position to offer placements, to their mutual benefit.

What we propose is this: student members will complete a placement request form and email it to the IAP. This form will contain information about their existing skills, start and end dates of the proposed placement, area to which they can commute (if applicable) and so on. We will edit this down to the most salient information and issue a list of all extant placement requests, in geographical location order, with *IAPetus*. Members who want to offer placements can then contact the IAP for more detailed information about any student who wants to work in their area and who

has appropriate skills.

Members can also contact us at any time between *IAPetus* issues and we'll send them the current list, preferably electronically, because then it's easily searchable. When a member has identified a possible placement student, we will email the student, notifying him or her of the member's contact details. We will ask members who make use of the service to report briefly on their contacts – for instance, whether a placement was offered, and, if not, why not, so that we can build a picture of how well the system is working and maintain the database.

The IAP prides itself on responding to members' needs rapidly and this is a good example. This system didn't exist in September. Now it's up and running. But it's also true that, by the same token, we've done no 'consumer testing' before implementation. So we'd welcome your comments as to its likely usefulness to you and whether there are any refinements that could be made to it that would help you. Are there, for instance, particular pieces of information about the students that you would like to see included? Would you prefer to contact the students directly in the first instance? Please let me know what you think, through the Office, or at eo@iap.org.uk.

Robin Jones
Education Officer

current developments that are affecting the computer industry, and his evident confidence that organisations can successfully respond to the challenges of achieving secure, reliable and stable systems that enable e-business.

Dr. Timothy Spiller achieved the remarkable distinction of giving a talk that many voted the most interesting, while admitting they had not understood it at all. Delegates were transported to a world of tiny quantum sized particles, where familiar physical laws no longer seem to apply. But if your brain can survive the journey, and some delegates found the preceding cream tea had rather dulled their capacity, then vast new territories open up. Classical barriers come down, opening the way to staggering computational power, and a complete redefinition of cryptography and communication. Even Star

Trek style teleportation becomes theoretically possible. However, the Principle Engineer of Hewlett-Packard Laboratories admitted that there are still a few little technical problems to be overcome before we can grasp this particular Holy Grail.

The session was brought to a conclusion with a simultaneously down-to-earth and upbeat presentation by Dr. Mark Gray, Director of the Oxford University CPD Centre. Some of the Centre's courses have been specifically evaluated by the IAP, so the two organisations already enjoy a close working relationship. Nevertheless it was good to hear the importance of developing and maintaining the right kind of skills so forcefully expounded by Dr. Gray. The quick fix approach to training, which we have seen too much of in the run up to Y2k, does not provide the foundation for a sustainable career.

Despite the best efforts of the Chairman, the Symposium ran over time and so the hoped-for open discussion at the end had to be cancelled. However, many members were not prepared to leave it at that, and migrated to a nearby pub where IAP President Jim Bates had made it known he would be "in the chair".

Wild and wilder theories were expounded as beer was consumed, and members took advantage of a rare opportunity to bend the ears of fellow professionals who both understood and were interested in what they had to say.

"only Unix, and now Linux, can provide the reliability and security necessary for net commerce to prosper"

A statement from the Director General, September 1999:

Several members have contacted me regarding letters, purportedly from Nigeria, which seek to involve them in dubious but supposedly highly profitable financial dealings.

Most people in business will already be familiar with these letters. The Institution itself has received several, spread over the past few years.

Despite the best efforts of the Nigerian and UK governments to stamp it out, the racket continues to flourish. Thousands of letters are sent to innocent people: inevitably a few of them are gullible enough to respond and then get taken to the cleaners in ways I won't even attempt to explain.

Nigerian Swindle Letter

I would reassure you that these letters are not targeted particularly at members of the IAP: the perpetrators will write to anyone at all who they believe has the financial credibility necessary for the scheme to work. If you ignore the letter they cannot touch you.

The most annoying aspect of this latest flurry of letters is that the authors appear to be using a copy of the Institution's Yearbook. I would emphasise that the Year-

book is only ever sent to paid up members of the IAP: we never give copies to anyone else, and we never sell this valuable information to outsiders.

It is not available on disc, so the only way these people can have got hold of the Yearbook is from a member of the IAP. I would urge you to always keep your personal copy secure, so as to prevent this kind of thing from happening again.

There is no suggestion that any of the IAP's Nigerian members are party to this racket.

However, if we do find that a member of the IAP has assisted in its promotion, he will be in serious breach of the Institution's Code of Conduct, and will be disciplined accordingly.

There is no increase for Students, Graduates or Retired members. The other rates have risen only by £5.00.

The Institution continues to expand its services for members.

uses an agent, Miller Firstline (NLA), to collect the money from members' accounts, and it is their name, not the name of the Institution, that will appear on your bank statement. Your subscription is due each year

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From 1st January 2000 the following rates will apply:

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Associate Member	£70.00
Graduate	£50.00
Student	£40.00
Retired member	£40.00

All these rates are reduced by £5.00 if you pay by direct debit because it saves us having to write every time a payment is due. Over 80% of our UK members already pay by this method and if you want to join them just phone the office for a form.

Please note that the Institution

on the anniversary of the day you joined the Institution, and covers your membership for the following twelve months.

need to confirm that you are 60, have been a member for at least ten years, and are no longer available for work except on an occasional basis.

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In pursuit of excellence – Continued from Page 1

out to do. If we want to be good analyst-programmers we must continually strive to provide a critical evaluation of the business case, produce a verifiable and working model, and most importantly implement that model with the complete 'buy-in' of those who will use the end result. Often a proper analysis reveals flaws in the current business practices. As a good analyst it is reasonable to expect that you will offer some alternative thinking on the subject. You ought to have the courage of your convictions to state your sentiments on the matter rather than to prostitute your thinking to the momentum of the status-quo. If you act as an independent consultant, you need to ensure that you preserve your integrity, as anything you participate in will carry your signature until the next systems renewal.

I find it sad that after ten years in the industry I still often find specialised people in the Industry who profess to know their subject and yet cannot field the simplest of questions or just don't seem very professional in the tasks that they undertake. The two most recent projects that I have been involved in were flawed on a number of counts.

The first suffered from a lack of executive 'buy-in'. We're probably all familiar with the notion that, 'well it works – so it doesn't need fixing', that's the type of mediocrity that results in spaghetti code and a deluge of disparate systems that eventually can no longer be held together with magic tape and baling twine. As the on-site integrator I had the task of supporting the actual developers in the pursuit of prescribing the business processes after having fully analysed the requirements of the environment and the existing processes. The project succeeded because of the sheer momentum sustained by a tight-knit team of analysts who held the users' hands until the project was signed off, it was a long and arduous process. The advantage to the client was a well documented and planned system as opposed to the outgoing hodgepodge. It was costly project in terms of delays, physical costs and unnecessary grey hairs for the analysts and the users.

Although a forced down the throat approach was used, this project effectively succeeded in all its objectives primarily because standards were maintained and principles upheld despite all the odds.

The second project also suffered from a lack of executive involvement but differed in that there was belief that prevailed that the implementation would succeed despite the lack of buy-in. The executive agreed that the project needed to be undertaken and was prepared to, and finally did, invest significant capital in the implementation. It differed from the first project in that it was an integration exercise rather than bespoke development. The second project will succeed but only after having been jump started several times out of criticality to the enterprise. On the final leg it involves forced involvement on the part of the executive quite simply because these are the resources that know the business best and the integration team are no longer playing the role of integrators but rather business analysts who are integrating a pre-existing system. The analysts are not incompetent, they're just wrapped up in the debugging process, understanding new processes and how, they differ with the processes expected by the system. The inability to successfully integrate the system initially was a result of passive a approach to the implementation and concentrating too much on the techie aspects and not enough on the functionality and human elements of systems implementation. I don't for one minute believe that it is necessarily because the subject matter was too complex. I do believe it is more a case of having lost the interest of doing a good job because of the battle for adoption and instead getting wrapped up in the bits and bytes of the implementation. When we move from those areas that we know best, the project itself is compromised, standards are overlooked and quality is not maintained. Analyst programmers have the rare opportunity of often being the bridge of that gaping chasm between what the technology can do and what the business

requires. One could be excused for not having a perfect perspective of what the business requires but there really is no excuse for lacking familiarity and knowledge and maintaining it in the field you profess to be proficient in and assisting those who know the business, in travelling the path to a better implementation through transferring an understanding of how the technology can serve the enterprise's needs.

As a member of any institution or professional body, there is a minimum qualification requirement, your knowledge of your field is often represented by your accreditation and certification. The way you approach and handle any given project says reams about your actual ability to do the job and your professionalism. Your affiliation with the Institution can help you by instilling a modicum of confidence in the prospective client but your past work will actually communicate whether you will do the job properly. Hopefully in any task you undertake you will behave ethically and professionally, if you don't, you discredit the Institution and the profession as a whole.

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GOING FOR A JOB?

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Call Mike Ryan or Nicole Edwards on 0181 567 2118 or fax 0181 567 4379

With the recent announcements in Parliament concerning the legal acceptability of Digital Signatures, members may be interested in noting that Thawte are now providing free personal "digital certificates" and PGP key validation based on a unique national identity code – in the UK they'll accept a person's National Insurance/Tax Office number (This will be on your payslips and any letter from the Inland Revenue).

Thawte are one of the two main "certification agencies" world-wide – the other being Verisign – whose certificates are accepted by all the main browser and email packages.

The certificate comes in two flavours – "untrusted", where all that the certificate proves is that the signature belongs to the email address (this is what you initially get) and "trusted", where the certificate holder has validated his identity.

What is a digital certificate?

It is an encrypted document that uses Public Key Encryption to validate both that a document has not been tampered with, and that

"The Web of Trust is well established in the USA, but there are not many Web of Trust notaries in the UK yet"

the author is who they claim to be.

A certificate can be generated by anybody – but the certificate is only as good as the agency that certifies the validity of it – a home generated

Digital Certificates for All?

certificate would likely be rejected as "untrusted" by most of the main browsers and email packages until the reader decides that it is trustworthy.

How does a holder validate his identity to upgrade his certificate to "trusted"?

Thawte are establishing a "Web of Trust" world-wide – people whose identities that Thawte have validated via "trusted third parties" (TTPs for the UK are currently Bank Managers, Accountants and Solicitors who practice from a company address, and desk-based police officers) – who can, in turn, validate people themselves.

The Web of Trust is well established in the USA, but there are not many Web of Trust notaries in the UK yet – so there's a chance for those people who are interested to "get in on the ground floor".

In the UK, you would need to take to either two TTPs or to (in

general) two Web of Trust Notaries two pieces of identification – with copies for the validator (Additionally if you are using TTP's you'll need another copy that they endorse before you send them to Thawte). One must be a true "photo-id" – there are two national photo-ids available, a passport or a new-style plastic driving licence.

Additionally, works based photo-ids may be acceptable, depending on the notary. The other piece of ID should contain your National Insurance Number – for example a payslip or letter from the tax office that shows your name and NI number would satisfy this and the copies should also include on the same sheet a recent photograph.

Additionally if you are using TTP's, you'll also need to download the Thawte certificate that the TTP signs – and you may need an additional document (I have a copy!) if you want to use a desk-bound police officer as a TTP.

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Further information is available at Thawte's web site – <http://www.thawte.com> – and I can be emailed as well as arobertson@phoenix.co.uk

IR35 is very bad news for the IT industry and for UK plc. The government cannot wait until we join the Euro to give British industry away: they are giving away our lead in IT now.

IR35 A personal view

But I believe most people in this Institution have little to fear from IR35.

Market forces, not the Chancellor, determine what we get paid. We have rare and portable skills that the world cannot do without. If you bump up

your rates to pay the extra tax, most clients are going to have to accept it. The alternative is for them to take you on permanently – not an attractive option in view of the relatively short-term nature of most IT projects.

As with Y2k, a lot of people have seen IR35 as an opportunity to gain personal publicity by jumping on a scaremongers' bandwagon.

In reality I believe most serious contractors will still be in business after next April, because that is what the IT industry needs.

Conversely nurses, hospital cleaners and the like will probably return to regular employment

because there is no reason for them to be contractors except to save tax.

Not so with IT. Employers are going to think very hard before taking on permanent people at the kind of salaries IT professionals can command.

By the time they've costed in paid holidays, sick leave, maternity leave, pensions, stock options, the cost of implementing the rising tide of Euro legislation, and allowed for the fact they can probably never fire the guy, even if they've nothing left for him to do, this option becomes horrendously expensive.

Much better to pay him £1,000 a day and be done with it.