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School Financial Planning and the Credit Crunch

The uncertainty associated with government funding of higher education is almost as great as that surrounding the makeup of the next government (at the time of writing), but we should certainly anticipate that the recent past will not be a good model for the near future. In this setting, the school needs to take steps that enable it to retain the quality of its principal activities, while anticipating a significant tightening in its budget. Over a period, various actions have been taken, and/or plans put in place, with a view to improving our financial position, in a way that ensures that we are able to maintain key activities. This article, following on from the last school board, puts some numbers to the plans which, all being well, will tighten the school's financial position by just over £2 million (where 10% of government income that supports our core activities is around £1.2M). The hope is that such a tightening will be sufficient to see us through anticipated external pressures, without the wheels coming off the wagon. Our strategy is both to increase income and to reduce expenditure. Current plans are essentially as follows.

In terms of income, the following table associates ballpark annual values with various activities, where the anticipated movement is over a 5 year period from the 09/10 financial year (i.e. we are essentially one year in).

Target Areas for Income Growth	
Area	Value Over 5 Years
UG Student Retention	£200K
Overseas PGT	£500K
Continuing Professional Development	£150K
EU Research Sustainability	£200K
M+N Agreements	£200K
Total	£1,250

To take these in turn: we have steadily been revising (upwards in general) entry grades at undergraduate level, and anticipate improved retention rates from a broadly flat number of entrants; we have revised our advanced masters programmes and associated web presence, which combined with a weak pound seems at present to be resulting in significant numbers growth; we are expanding our distance learning activity, off the back of the revised masters programmes; we are taking steps to improve the profile of EU funding opportunities with a view to increasing success rates and the number of applications made; and we are investigating opportunities with good Chinese universities to accept undergraduates into our second year.

In terms of expenditure, the following table associates ballpark annual values with various planned reductions.

Area	Value Over 5 Years
Academic Staff Salaries	£350K
Non Academic Staff Salaries	£250K
Core Non Pay	£250K

Total	£850
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To take these in turn: we have plans to replace the 10 academic staff who are scheduled to retire over a five year period with 5 new appointments; we anticipate looking very closely at all support staff departures, with a view to identifying opportunities for changes in practice that will allow staffing levels to be somewhat reduced – savings to date are around half the target level; and we have, for the financial year 2010/11, absorbed a cut of £250K in our core non pay budget which essentially means that there is now little or no slack (this can be expected to cause inconvenience on an ongoing basis).

Now, a plausible reading of the above is that we will simply have more students and fewer staff, with an accompanying downward pressure on standards, both for teaching and research. To mitigate this, there must also be action to ensure that we operate as efficiently as possible; anticipate, for example, that we will seek to reduce the total number of course units taught over the next few years, with a view to reducing overheads associated with preparation, exam setting, etc. In addition, in terms of academic staff, both fellowship schemes and buyouts mean that we are currently working with around 4 fewer FTEs than the headline figure.

Overall, then, we have plans in place that, if implemented, will improve the financial position of the school to an extent that might be expected to match the levels of external reductions in government funding. We are being proactive in putting these plans in place because the alternative seems to be to wait passively for the axe to fall, which is surely not a winning solution (and in any event is not one that would be tolerated by the university). In terms of ERVS, then, we will look at applications in the context of our plans for managed reductions in staffing levels, in a setting where our overall strategy is not for arbitrary numbers of people to leave from random places.

Events

President Visit to School **10 May 10**

The president will be visiting the school on the afternoon of Monday 10th May; from 2:45 to 3:20 there will be an open session for all staff in IT 407, which will include a short presentation and an extended question and answer session.

SIGGRAPH: State of the Art in Game Console Graphics **14 May 10**

Naty Hoffman, Activision Inc
14:00, Room 1.10, Kilburn Building

[More information](#)

Seminar on SAP Research and Collaboration Opportunities **17 May 10**

13:00-14:00, Atlas 1, Kilburn Building

SAP Research carries out research in a wide range of computer science subjects in which the school has an interest (e.g. Service Oriented Architectures, Virtualization/Parallelism, Semantics and Ontologies, Web 2.0 Applications), and some contacts already exist between staff in the school and SAP Research.

SAP interact with universities in a range of different ways, including:

- Placements - for example for academic staff on sabbatical or for research students making short visits.
- Studentships - for example, where SAP research staff members register for research degrees with universities.
- EU Projects - where SAP research participate widely.

With a view to exploring opportunities for collaboration with the school, Ben Greene (Director of SAP Research in Belfast) will be visiting the school on Monday 17th May, and there will be an open session with input on SAP Research and collaboration opportunities in Atlas1, 13:00-14:00. Further details on SAP Research can be obtained from:

- [SAP Research](#)
- [SAP Research Belfast](#)

SAP also look like promising employers for current research students.

Network Dynamics and Synchronization **17-19 May 10**

Alan Turing Building

This three day conference will look at problems involving the theory of synchronization in network systems, and applications in biology and engineering.

There have been major theoretical breakthroughs in this area through the work of Field on the one hand (with the idea of re-patching equivalence) and Golubitsky and Stewart (through balanced colouring). One of the motivations behind this conference is to stimulate the interaction between researchers working on particular applications and those involved in theoretical issues. It is particularly important that graduate students and other younger researchers understand the breadth of the area (if working in applications) or the way applications can stimulate new theoretical questions (if working on theory), and the LMS provides five bursaries (3 nights accommodation and lunch only) for UK graduate student participation.

[Website](#)

eLearning Workshops **Various dates**

Turnitin&Grademark/eAssesment/Blackboard

People who should read this: Anyone interested in developing their eLearning skills. The following Workshops are running during the months of June and July.

Turnitin and Grademark for Academics

This workshop is for academics wishing to use online submission, marking and feedback.

June 18th 2pm-4pm, July 20th 10am-12pm

Turnitin and Grademark for Administrators

This workshop is for administrators involved in the setting up and running of Turnitin Assignments.

June 18th 10am-12pm, July 20th 2pm-4pm

Formative eAssessment using Blackboard

This workshop introduces Academics to the assessment tool in Blackboard with a focus on creating and managing formative quizzes with feedback.

June 11th 2pm-4pm, July 23rd 10am-12pm

Improve your Blackboard space

This workshop looks at how you can get more from your blackboard space and

invites attendees to discuss any issues they have with Blackboard with Learning Technologists and fellow participants.

June 11th 10am-12pm, July 23rd 2pm-4pm

All courses are scheduled for an hour and a half with an additional half hour for any further questions and discussion. Workshops will be held in the Kilburn Building, Training Room 1.

Anyone interested in booking onto the courses please [email](#).

TransferSummit/UK

Keble College, Oxford 24-25 June

TransferSummit provides a forum for business executives and members of the academic and research community to discuss requirements, challenges, and opportunities in the use, development, licensing, and future of Open Source technology.

For more details and to register see <http://www.transfersummit.com>