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**News from Head of School****Steve Furber to be REF Panel Chair**

Congratulations to Steve Furber on his selection as the Chair of the Research Excellence Framework Panel for Computer Science. Being selected for such a responsible role is a strong signal as to his standing in the national computer science community.

**Research Council Grant Applications**

The recent Comprehensive Spending Review has been reasonably supportive of science, and it is anticipated that budgets for research councils will reduce only at close to the rate of inflation over the next four years after a period of growth. This means that the school should be in a position to broadly maintain its research council income over the next few years.

Unfortunately, 2009/10 was not an especially strong year for the school. Although our EPSRC success rate was 50% and our BBSRC success rate was 28%, this was in the context of a much reduced total number of applications where the average size was smaller than in previous years, giving rise to much reduced income. Early signs in relation to our 2010/11 research income are not especially promising, so this email is to encourage research active staff to compete for research council funding for research.

**Operational Performance Review**

The university carries out an annual Operational Performance Review (OPR), which explores many different figures on teaching and research performance. For the most part, Computer Science seems to perform reasonably well (although lots of figures are hard to compare across schools). The current state of play in headline activities is that our research funding is reasonably flat after a period of growth, and that our citation position is strong using the methodology the university prefers. In teaching, our National Student Survey score is now satisfactory (in general we should not be satisfied with satisfactory...), and in the current year our admissions position looks quite strong.

The two things the university is most worried about in the school are:

- *Progression Rates*: For undergraduate students entering the school in 2009, almost 20% did not enter second year in the university. To me this is a real issue, as each case involves a student having a really bad experience of some form; I was determined that this figure would improve during my tenure, and it has a bit, but it is still the worst in the university, and much too high. The problematic progression rate results from a combination of voluntary departures and exam failure. There are several reasons to anticipate that our progression rates will improve for the 2010 cohort.
  - *Increased grades*: The average grade for our students increased from BBB to ABB between 2009 and 2010; our entry grades have increased significantly in each of the last 3 years.
  - *Reduced numbers from clearing*: The number of students entering through clearing reduced by around 20. There are concerns that some students who come to us through clearing end up on programmes that are not really what they want (e.g. business or

mathematics students who end up on cross-school programmes with more computing than they want), and that this contributes to poor retention.

- *Reduced numbers of students on cross-school programmes.* The fraction of students on cross-school programmes has reduced, partly as a result of the above two points; progression rates are somewhat better on single-honours programmes.
- *Clearing:* The university tends towards the view that clearing students dilute quality. However, many good students end up in clearing having missed very high entry thresholds. This year (unlike some previous years) we have been able to make the case that the use of clearing has not reduced our overall entry quality. It is not clear that university senior management have been listening to this case.
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Various people did a lot of leg work trying to improve our understanding of some of the numbers in the OPR in the run up to the grilling this tends to be; their help is much appreciated!

### PhD Plus awards

Congratulations to the following who have recently received a PhD Plus award:

Christoph Sticksel  
Josephat Kalezhi  
Marios Alexandrou  
Yuanjing Shi

### Congratulations to Djihed Afifi

One of our postgraduate students, Djihed Afifi, has won the prize for Best tool/Demo paper as part of the 1<sup>st</sup> International Runtime verification conference held at the beginning of November 2010. The paper was titled “ESAT: A Tool for Animating Logic-based Specifications of Evolvable Component Systems” and the prize involves a cash sum of €200.

## Events

### CICADA Workshops

15/16 and 18 Nov 10

The Centre for Interdisciplinary Computational and Dynamical Analysis (CICADA) announces two workshops to be held in the week beginning 15 November 2010. Both workshops are in the Alan Turing Building. CICADA is a collaboration between the Schools of Mathematics, Computer Science and Electrical and Electronic Engineering. Talks cover topics at the interface between the three disciplines with a wide range of applications, but with a strong focus on bioscience applications. Dave Broomhead is the Director of CICADA. Registration is free, but required, for both workshops, please [Helen Harper](#).

15-16 Nov: Meeting in Honour of Dave Broomhead's 60th birthday

[Further information](#)

18 Nov: IM-CPS 2010 International Symposium on Interdisciplinary Modeling of Cyber-Physical Systems

[Further information](#)

### Parallel Computing using MPI

16 Nov 10

MPI (Message Passing Interface) has emerged as a standard for writing portable, message-passing programs for parallel computers with distributed memory (such as the national HPC facility, HECToR).

An intensive one day course, introducing the essentials of MPI, sufficient to parallelize a serial code, and including hands-on sessions is being run by IT Service on Tuesday 16 November. To apply for a place please [visit the site](#).

**School Board meeting** **17 Nov 10**

1530-1700 in IT building room 407.  
17 November 2010 (UG report and Teaching Strategy report)

**Annual Sustainability Focus event** **17 Nov 10**

Come along to the University's Focus on Travel exhibition on Wednesday, 17 November and learn more about what we as individuals and as a University can do to reduce the carbon emissions caused by our daily commuting and business travel.

The University is committed to reducing its carbon footprint by 40% by 2020 and transport-related emissions make up a significant part of this footprint.

The exhibition will run from 10am to 2pm at University Place, Oxford Road.

[www.sustainability.manchester.ac.uk/campus/travel](http://www.sustainability.manchester.ac.uk/campus/travel)

**Cyber bullying session** **17 Nov 10**

12:30, to last around 45 minutes. G021 Pariser Building.

As part of Anti Bullying Week (November 15<sup>th</sup> – 19<sup>th</sup>) and November's Diversity Calendar Theme of Dignity at Work, we are delighted to announce a lunchtime session on 'Cyber Bullying'.

Spaces are limited, please contact [Paul Marks-Jones](#) for further information or to reserve a place.

**Cloud computing: an overview and an example using next generation sequencing** **19 Nov 10**

Robert Haines, myGrid Team, School of Computer Science.  
14-15:00, Room 1.10, Kilburn Building.

**The Scholarly Communication Landscape: Opportunities and challenges** **30 Nov 10**

10-17:00, The Manchester Conference Centre, Sackville Street.

This is a one day symposium with keynote presentations from renowned speakers. The purpose is to help University staff and research students understand some of the more complex issues presented by the technological, financial and social developments that are transforming scholarly communication.

The event is aimed at University researchers (staff and students), research support staff, librarians, research managers, and anyone with an active interest in the field will find this symposium helpful to their developing use and provision of research in digital formats.

To register an interest, please visit our website, or email [Carly Rolfe](#).

Closing date for registration is 26 November 2010.

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## Funding Opportunities

**TSB funding opportunity: Technology-Inspired Collaborative Research and Development. October 2010 competition for funding** **18 Nov 10**

**Summary**

The Technology Strategy Board proposes to stimulate innovation across its key enabling technology areas to help ensure that UK businesses are well-equipped to respond to the challenges presented by the economic downturn and slow recovery. We have allocated up to £18m to invest in collaborative research and development projects.

- The core technology areas covered by this competition are:
- Advanced Materials
- Biosciences
- Electronics, Photonics and Electrical Systems
- High Value Manufacturing
- Information and Communications Technology
- Nanotechnology.

See [document](#).