School Liaison Report
Morna Findlay, 06.01.07

Visits from Schools

We hosted visits from Liberton Primary School and S2 pupils from Holyrood High school.

We also tried out our new "lambda calculus" workshop, developed by Phil Wadler and his student Stuart Grundy on two sets of pupils. The first group were 25 fifteen year-olds from CastleBrae High School, Wester Hailes Education Centre and Craigroyston High, the second smaller group part of the University's summer "Kickstart" program. This workshop presented quite a big learning curve to me, and I think I'm still on the curve. Phil presented the workshop.

Visits to Schools

Throughout March and April, Barbara, Finlay Stewart and I visited several West Lothian primary schools which were taking part in a local robot challenge competition with a selection of our robots. In June Finlay and I visited Mid-Calder primary where we were invited to be judges in their robot competition final. I hope that this will become a regular event for us.

In June I attended careers days at Durham Sixth Form College and Cramlington High School in Northumberland. Both these visits went well, and gave me a lot of ideas on how I intend to approach such talks in the future. The Computing teacher at Durham Sixth form college expressed an interest in bringing his students to visit us, assuming we were running some kind of suitable event.

Other Visits

I attended the "Rampaging Chariots" event at Selex systems on June 23, run by Scottish Young Engineers clubs, where I handed out leaflets and old equipment (formerly used for the SDP).

We visited Aberdour festival on August 1st, where we (Barbara, her students Michael, Matt and I) ran a three-hour "Walking with Robots" drop-in session. This was a raging success with the audience and the organisers and we've already been invited to attend again next year.

Making Contacts with Schools and Teachers

In June I attended a meeting of Edinburgh Principal Teachers of computing at Drummond High. I explained that all the university Computing depts report a drop in student numbers and are concerned enough to work together to redress this and to try and work more closely with teachers. The response of the teachers was very positive and we agreed to form a joint universities-schools working party to see what we can come up with locally. I agreed to host the first meeting of this working party, and to invite the other local universities along. This meeting is going to be held on August 26 in the Appleton Tower. I am very hopeful that this group is going to help us devise events, materials and demos that schools are going to be very keen on attending or using - such as the computing careers day idea that we floated.

I have agreed with local PTs of computing that we will offer four CPD twilight sessions for local computing teachers here in Informatics over
the winter. We'll be initially using some materials created by Glasgow University's CSI project, but I am hoping that we can come up with two CPD packages for the final session on our own.

Contacts in Other Areas.
I am now concentrating on contacting all Scottish councils in order to find the "right" person to speak to about the promotion of computing in their secondary schools. This seems to have worked well in Edinburgh, so I'm hoping this is the best way to make good contacts with teachers elsewhere. It certainly helps that I can claim (with some authority) to speak on behalf of Scottish Computing departments and not "just" the School of Informatics - for example buy explaining about the teachers working group and the CPD evenings we are organising.

Materials

Posters

I want us to start regularly producing posters suitable for schools to display in their classrooms. Ideally these will advertise Informatics as a discipline first, and the School of Informatics second, in order to make sure that schools are happy to display more than one of our posters.

The medical imaging unit are working on a poster for us, based on photographs we took at the SDP demonstration day in March. I intend to give some of these posters to the International Office to take with them on their recruitment tours and to send the rest to all Scottish secondary schools.

WAMS (formerly Malts) are also working on a poster for us - based on the three winning entries in our student poster competition. An example of this poster will be ready for the prize giving day in September and I hope will encourage next year's intake to take part in the 2008 competition.

CS4FN

We bought 500 copies of CS4FN magazine, which I have been using to distribute at events and also to hand out to school teachers. I'd really like us to be regularly featured in this magazine.
See: http://www.cs4fn.org/

I think Chris Williams "premature baby" projects would be a good one to feature.
http://www.dai.ed.ac.uk/homes/ckiw/neonatal/
(I'm sure this was featured on our home page, but I can't seem to find it now!)

External Liaison

I met with Polly Purvis, of ScotlandIS who was interested to know about our local and joint recruitment activities. ScotlandIS have been researching the problem of student recruitment on their own and will be publishing a report on their conclusions very soon. I am hoping that they will agree to help us in practical ways - such as in publicising the christmas lectures.

The scotcs-pool group met here in the School of Informatics in June. The next meeting will be at Robert Gordon in September.

Our main task was to get the ACM-inspired "Computing Careers" leaflet
produced for distribution to Scottish Schools. This should be ready very soon, and is going to be distributed with the help of the RSE. Copies will also be available for us to use on open days et cetera.

Our second task is to develop a "computingscotland" web site which will promote the study of computing at all Scottish Universities. The main purpose of the site is to raise the profile of computing in Scotland, but each department will have its own pages and will have editorial control over those pages. We also discussed and agreed to hold Christmas lectures for schools. (see below)

**Christmas Lectures**

All the members of the scotcs-pool group (CS recruiters and admissions people) have agreed that as several universities already hold popular Christmas lectures, we will all try to offer one of these to schools and promote this as a national "event". The theme will be "Computing in the next fifty years" - thus enabling each department to highlight their own strengths, and invite whoever they like to speak - whether a local member of staff, or external speaker. There will be no obligation on any department to take part. I am going to ask Colin Adams if he has any ideas.

**Careers Fairs**

I will be attending the Lothian Careers fair on September 13 along with Heriot Watt and Napier University Computing departments. We're going to have a joint stand.

**Workshops and Demonstrations**

As well as Phil's Lambda Calculus workshop, we're also developing workshops on Encryption and PIN cracking. Bjorne Franke's student Andrew Moss is also extending his "Pen Programming" project for us to use as an open-day Demo. Bjorn has two more students taking up this work next year so we'll be able to extend that.

I have had several discussions with staff (Frank Keller, Jon Oberlander, Helen Pain amongst others) about how we might take experimental Informatics demos into schools - ie enable students to plan, organise and carry out experiments. I hope that the school-university working group will give us a way to move forwards on this - we can't go off and buy equipment if we can't get into the schools to use it!

**Requests for Teaching Committee**

There are certain things I'd like to consider raising at teaching committee, though it seems that at least some of these have been raised before.

1. Invite a local computing teacher to speak at teaching committee - I think this would be very good PR and that teaching staff, many of whom have not been through the Scottish school system, would learn a lot about our incoming students.
2. Using our students achievements in our recruitment materials.

SDP
I'd like to suggest that we make as much use as possible of the SDP practical - considering that the students are already preparing to market their completed system to industry visitors, it's not much of an extra stretch to add on a public-engagement element too.

4th Year projects
We make much of the range of projects that our fourth year students can work on - yet give almost no examples. All the universities claim their students carry out interesting project work and some have made more effort than we have to show this.

3. Lack of Computing Teachers in Schools

I'd like us to look at ways of encouraging interested undergraduates to get a bit of in-school experience. I imagine that initially this would just be helping me on school visits. Long-term I'd like to see what we can learn from other departments.

Miscellaneous

Euro-Ambassadors

Do we want to try this out again this year? If so - when would be the best time to contact our foreign students and ask for suitable volunteers. Would we give them a bit of training this time?

DVD for Applicants

I want to order some more copies of the DVD we produced last year, to give to the International Office and for our own occasional needs. Anna, Stuart and I discussed whether we wanted to update this DVD for the coming year's applicants - I'm afraid to say I can't tell from my notes whether we decided just to use the same one again! or not!

Informatics Web Pages

I believe that some effort was previously put into making sure these pages were highly ranked.
Is it time to do that again?

Could we improve our pages so that a prospective applicant might be able to enter their qualifications and/or their interests in order to help them sift through our large list of degrees?

For example - if you come in via the university's pages to:

http://www.ed.ac.uk/studying/undergraduate/finder/subject.html?id=0,9

you will find a list of degrees different from those on our own pages

- eg "Mind and Language", "Music Technology" - is this the university's mistake or ours?

I can't understand from the web pages how these degrees relate to the School of Informatics.