Morna Findlay

School Visits - On Campus
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School Visits - On Campus

We have recently hosted several visits by primary and secondary schools. These visits have been organised by the SRA as part of their widening access scheme.

- March 14 - Clovenstone Primary School: We delivered the Binary workshop to two groups of primary 7 pupils of obvious mixed abilities. The workshop went well and afterwards, the pupils were invited into the neighbouring labs to watch the SDP students at work on their robots.
- March 29th - Beath (Fife) and Newbattle (Midlothian) High Schools: Two workshops lasting 90 minutes each. We delivered the binary workshop, which the pupils worked through easily. Two of the postgraduate demonstrators (Sean and Michael Mangan) then gave quick demonstrations of their postgraduate work and members of SDP group 7 demonstrated their mine/nuclear debris clearing robot. These kids were spending a whole week at the university, visiting numerous departments. Their teachers asked for copies of our materials and commented that this was the best workshop they'd attended all week and are very keen to work more with us. I have their emails.

Forthcoming Workshops

- April 20 - Liberton Primary School: We plan to use the Binary workshop again.
- May 30 - HolyRood High School: A 2 hour workshop for 15 s2 pupils. I haven't yet decided what we'll do! We may adapt Diana's recent successful Science Festival animation workshop.
- July 16 - Summer Kickstart program: A "half-day" workshop for s5 pupils. We probably can't use the old robot arms we used for this workshop in previous years. Ideas welcome!

School Visits - Off Campus

Visits to back up local schools lego robot competition. (Thanks to Barbara Webb and Finlay Stewart)

- March 26 - Mid-Calder Primary school
- April 17 - East Calder and Kiknewton
- April 18 - Parkhead Primary School
- April 25 Woodmuir and Addiewell primary schools (joint visit)

Other:

- May (tba) - Peebles High School Engineers Club
- May (tba) Castlebrae High School
- June - Durham careers fair
- June (tba) Blythe
- June - TBA - "final" of competition at West Calder High School.

Vists with other organisations:
- With Scifun - Dunbar High School
- With SRA - Fettes College Career Fair

Other:
- April 25: Liberton High School - inaugural meeting of science club

To be arranged:
- Peebles High School - Young Engineers Club

**SCHOOL VISITS - EUROPE**

At meetings held on 27th Feb and March 8, attended by acm,dsisu,morna.sviglas,bwebb,soa and Shona Gillies and Niall Bradley (SRA) we decided to ask our European students who might be visiting home shortly to go back to their old schools and talk to the staff abd students about studying Informatics at Edinburgh. We would offer then up to fifty pounds towards any travelling expenses this might entail - the understanding being that they are going home anyway, and not making a special trip, but we will re-imburse any reasonable travel expenses involved.

I emailed all European students (unless their grades seemed poor). Four students agreed to take part: Ronny Wiegand (Germany), Thomas Drapier (France), Carmen Istrade (Romania) and Michal Bartosik (Poland). I met with them and gave them some materials to take and some suggestions as to how they might approach the visits. I also emailed the heads of the schools to explain that the students would be approaching them.

Ronny mentioned that his old school is a special technical college and often sends students to the UK to study English - the SRA are interested in following this up - if they can come to Edinburgh the students could be invited into Informatics.

**LIAISON - EDINBURGH UNIVERSITY**

**SRA**

After starting in the post, I spent an afternoon at the SRA (Student Recruitment and Admissions) getting the lie of the land. The SRA are very keen to work together with Schools Liaison staff and I am keen to reciprocate. They have given me access to their events database and I've been adding out self-generated visits to this.

They do not appear to have a centralised contact list for schools. We agree that somehow this must be worked towards - it looks unproffesional if various parts of the university are contacting a school without any coordination.

**School Liaison Staff**

I have had initial meetings with Andrew Firth (Engineering), Elizabeth Stevenson (Chemistry) and Lois Rollings (Maths). I'm particularly keen to work more with Andrew, especially as he has all of Isabelle's old contact lists! We'll be meeting next week to work out how we can do this.

Fiona MacNeill has been appointed as the school Liaison Officer for AISB, so we'll be looking at working together in some way.

**SCIFUN**

While the future of SCIFun seems uncertain, I still hope we can work with them, especially in devising new and portable Informatics exhibits. We have taken their advice into account.
when designing a second version of the Connect-4 playing robot.

Maths

Eric and I wondered if the university might be able to offer a pre-matriculation Maths course which might be suitable for some foreign students (who might be here doing a pre-matriculation English course anyway) and some FE students (who might not have higher maths). Eric has been speaking to Maths about this and it looks possible - further discussions required.

LIAISON - SCOTTISH UNIVERSITIES

I contacted my counterparts in all the other Scottish university computing departments, asking them if they thought there was mutual benefit to be derived in meeting up. We held a meeting in Dundee University on March 12th. Representatives from all the universities were there, excepting Heriot-Watt, who couldn't make it, and Paisley and Gcal where I did not successfully make contacts with the "right" people.

The meeting was very positive and we decided to meet again - on April 26 at Atrathclyde University. We decided to work together on publicising computing-related degrees as interesting and useful, feeling that increasing the pool of potential applicants will benefit us all. Happily the SHOC had independently decided that similar joint action is a good idea.

Some suggestions for joint action under discussion are:

- Materials on computing-related degrees and career paths: Chemistry have done this pretty effectively.
- National computing-related competitions for schools
- Using initiatives like CSI, SCiFUn. The Science centres, the RBS computing clubs for Girls, CS4Fun etc.

I note that many of these departments already run competitions for local schools and offer special "Christmas Lectures". I think we should do this too.

LIAISON - SCHOOLS

Edinburgh

Computing

I am meeting Raymond Simpson, who is the Edinburgh contact for Computing teachers, on April 30 and have asked to attend the next meeting of Edinburgh Computing PTs in June. The idea is that we are going to develop some materials useful to teachers in their teaching of the curriculum, and hopefully offer them some CPD evenings/weekends here at Informatics. Initially we might use the CPD materials developed by the CSI teach at Glasgow, and I'm going to attend one of their CPD evenings next week, to see how that goes.

Maths I will hopefully have arranged to meet with the contact for Maths teachers within Edinburgh in the next week or two.

East Lothian

At the recent BarCampScotland hosted by Informatics, I met and talked with a number of teachers and hope to be arranging visits to their schools soon.

Scotland

I have been asked to attend a workshop on the Future of Computing in Schools on May 3 and 4 at Jordanhill College. I would very much appreciate input on the proposed programme - I'll bring the details along to the meeting.
LIAISON - OTHER

Young Engineers

I invited one of the organisers of the Young Engineers Clubs of Scotland, and ex Peebles High school teacher Kathleen Hill, along to see the SDP robots in action at out last UCAS day. I expect this organisation to be a good route into schools. There are 204 Young Engineers clubs in Scotland and they're making a push to form more in the Borders at the moment.

Careers Scotland

Engineering and chemistry have recently carried out a number of initiatives through careers Scotland and I hope to emulate this. Both these departments place a lot of emphasis on showing as well as telling - eg Engineering have been running soldering workshops for schools both here and at schools. We need to have more along this line to offer when we try to arrange visits.

Connected Magazine

I was recently interviewed by Connected Magazine, which looks at IT from a teacher's perspective and has a circulation amongst Scottish teachers of 33,000. I have not yet seen the copy but expect it to highlight our efforts to reach out to the public about the new science of Informatics. They promised to highlight out desire to both visit schools and invite them to visit us.

RECRUITMENT MATERIALS AND DEMOS.

Posters

We're running a poster competition for students (first prize two hundred pounds) to design a poster aimed at 15-year-old schoolchildren who don't know much about Informatics. The closing date is 30th April. If we get enough good entries, I plan to take advice from local schoolkids on which poster is the best.

DVD

We made a DVD (running time 8 minutes) to send to all students to whom we have made an offer this year. Time was tight and our ambitions correspondingly limited, but if we feel this exercise has been worthwhile, then we have plenty of unused footage in the can to perhaps make a more ambitious version for next year. The main aim was to present teaching staff to the prospective freshers in the certain hope that this would encourage them to choose Edinburgh.

Demos

A new version of the Connect-4 robot is being made by the FH technicians.

Several staff whose 4th year students projects were indicated as being suitable for demonstration purposes have been approached and negotiations with them and the students are ongoing. I hope that this will result in at least two projects providing us with new demos for open days, school visits or the science festival.

FUTURE STRATEGIES.

- Contact Young Engineers Clubs in schools to offer visits - probably with robots
- Develop materials supporting maths and computing curriculum
- Contact schools offering
  1. On-site visit for pupils
  2. Off-site CPD for teachers
- Research possible articles for CS4Fun, CSI etc - we are not the only ones trying to encourage more interest in computing-related subjects
- Develop hands-on workshops for a variety of ages.
- Recruit quite a lot more student helpers
- Piggy-back on more SRA visits.