Initial report from BCS Accreditation Visit

John Longley, Director of Quality
Teaching Committee, 12 November 2014

Our six-yearly accreditation visit from the British Computer Society took place on Wednesday 5 November. The panel of 5 (plus a BCS secretary) met with a selection of our students and staff to assess whether our degree programmes met the criteria for accreditation; their questions were based on their study of an extensive documentary submission about our programmes and courses which we had submitted 8 weeks earlier.

We had applied to various accreditation levels for our taught programmes UG and MSc according to the amount of computing content they contain. The recommendation of the panel (subject to ratification by a BCS committee) was that we be granted all the accreditations we applied for, subject to some fairly modest provisos:

- For UG degrees, accreditation will be conditional on the final-year project being passed without compensation. (We were expecting this, as the same condition was imposed at the previous accreditation.)
- For our MSc programmes, accreditation is subject to embedding more material on legal, social, ethical and professional issues in the compulsory parts of the programme. The panel suggested that this could be done in a relatively lightweight way by working such content into the existing IRR/IRP and project modules. We would have a 90-day period in which to set this up – in practice longer, as the period doesn’t begin until we receive our official visit report from BCS. I offer this to the present committee for discussion.

Overall we were commended for our strong teaching provision and research culture. The panel also made a number of other observations and recommendations (not critical to accreditation). Here are a selection which the committee may wish to discuss:

- The panel recommended that we take seriously some concerns raised by students regarding levels of support and feedback: in particular, the students were wanting greater individual support for early-year programming, and more individualized feedback on coursework. The panel acknowledged the very substantial progress we have made recently on improving the timeliness and quality of our feedback to students, but considered it imperative that this drive should continue.
- According to the panel, the coverage of legal, social, ethical and professional issues in our UG programmes is currently ‘at threshold’ for accreditation. They encouraged us to take steps to ensure that coverage of such issues was embedded more systematically across the entire curriculum.
- The panel recommended that material on computer security be embedded more widely in our compulsory UG courses. Likewise, they suggested that a higher profile be given to risk and safety aspects, and to the issue of deploying systems to meet specific business goals.