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EDITORIAL

It is a reflection of the current times in the United Kingdom that one's expectation on noticing a newspaper article about universities is that its content is bound to be concerned with the shortage of resources. All universities, even such venerable institutions as the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge, which one had assumed to be affluent and immune from financial difficulties, have suffered quite considerable cuts in their income and are having difficulty in balancing income and expenditure. It was, therefore, like a breath of fresh air, to read about one university where at least in one department resources were not a problem! The university is at Salford, which is close to Manchester, England. Despite the fact that Salford University is a technological one, and therefore seen by the United Kingdom government as providing education of direct relevance to industry and commerce, Salford's income was particularly severely reduced. The reaction of the university authorities after the initial complaining was a very positive one. Strenuous efforts were made to establish and consolidate links with industry and commerce. The success of the university in these endeavours is admirably demonstrated by the Information Technology Institute. The Institute was originally the initiative of the vice-chancellor John Ashworth. £1.4 million over three years was provided by the Universities Grants Committee on condition that the private sector matched the money. £1.5 million was raised in three months [1]. Over fifty companies, including some of the biggest in the United Kingdom, have become involved. In addition to money they provide equipment, software and advice. Teaching posts have been directly funded and staff have been seconded from a number of companies. Additionally, the sponsors, as they are called, have a majority representation on policy committees and on the syllabus committee.

There are, no doubt, many factors which have helped the success of the Institute but some which must have been of major importance are the course objectives. The degree stresses the application of new technology to organizations. "Students need a detailed knowledge of computing tools available for acquisition, storage, retrieval, analysis, transfer and presentation of information. They need in-depth knowledge of business procedures and information flows and how computing tools are used in different business environments. The course also covers the social, psychological and organisational problems arising from computerisation".

The scope may be wider and the emphases different, but this is surely familiar reading to information educators and practitioners. Salford's Institute provides the hard evidence of what some have been saying for some time. Other parties, outside the more traditional information studies fold, are beginning to take over information education.

There are many reasons why this is so, but not least amongst them is how information science is perceived. An article on the views of Gordon Scarrott, onetime manager of ICL's research and development team in the 1970s, and the ensuing correspondence highlighted this perception [2]. Scarrott has argued for some time that computer science is not science but engineering, and that what is needed is a "science of information". In a response Martin White stated that contrary to what Scarrott was arguing information science had been alive and well for three decades [3]. Scarrott's riposte was that he was well aware of information science but considered that the term had been adopted by specialists in information retrieval who concerned themselves with only a subset of the functions of information [4]. As far as he, and no doubt many others, were concerned that was that.

There has been much discussion (not least in this journal) and indeed some action on educating for the new information age (see the NEWS Section for an announcement about an exciting new course at Strathclyde University Glasgow). These types of initiatives, though, are all too few and too fragmented to have any real impact upon society and to demonstrate that information scientists have a significant part to play in analyzing the "I" in Information Technology. If this part is to be played, the profession needs not merely to present its case to its own members, but to present it to the decision makers within society.

In short, information science needs politicians, entrepreneurs, and public relations experts who have a vision for the future and an ability to realize it. If these individuals do not emerge soon, and are encouraged by the profession, one has real fears that information studies, as taught by the traditional schools and departments will be doomed to play an even smaller role in universal matters than it is currently playing.

1. *COMPUTING* November 12, 1987 pp. 36–37.
2. *COMPUTING* November 6, 1986 p. 36.
3. *COMPUTING* December 4, 1986 p. 14.
4. *COMPUTING* January 8, 1987 p. 10.

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