

## Ethics Forum<sup>1</sup> Review

### About the BCS Ethics Forum

The BCS Ethics Forum was officially launched in January 2007. In line with the objectives of the BCS Charter "to promote the study and practice of Computing and to advance knowledge and education therein for the benefit of the public"<sup>2</sup> our overall purpose is to support the BCS in maintaining the ethical standards expected from its members and supporting ethical practice on issues of local and global concern – such as the sharing of data, and the environment.

All forums activities are directed by members of its Strategic Panel – a group of active professionals recognised for their expertise. Our Strategic Panel members bring expertise from industry, the non-for-profit sector and academia. We have a Code of Conduct and Code of Practice Working Group, and a Carbon Footprint Working Group.

### Aim of BCS Ethics Forum

Recognising the central role of today's technologies in business and its impact on public and private life this Forum's aim is:

*To raise professional and public awareness of the importance of ethics in the research, development, deployment and implementation of today's systems, by engaging and educating relevant stakeholders.*

The relevant stakeholders we are engaging with are: BCS membership, other professionals in the IT, business, government and charities sectors, and the general public. We also liaise with other BCS Forums and Specialist Groups.

This review provides a profile of the work of the Forum during its first two years.

### Working with members and BCS groups

We seek input from members through our Ethics Blog, Ethics discussion area, and carbon footprint discussion area. We have asked members for their input to certain draft government consultation documents, and we have invited members to our workshops on current topics of interest.

For example our workshop on the issues of emerging technologies where we had experts talking about the ethical aspects of general issues such as accessibility and sustainability, and more specific issues of biometrics and robots. This workshop was also run in association with the Higher Education Academy<sup>3</sup>. Our ethics blog has covered issues ranging from whistle blowing, data centre efficiency, quality projects, biometrics and ID, privacy ... and more – all generating some interesting and often opposing comments<sup>4</sup>.

Possibly our most significant impact has been in the area of Green IT. The work we have carried out through our collaboration with the Data Centre Specialist Group in the creation of our Carbon Footprint Working Group has had a significant impact nationally and internationally. (For details of the work of this group see p.3)<sup>5</sup>.

In November 2008 we held a day workshop addressing 'Green IT' in association with the Higher Education Academy. We followed this through with an evening event in February 2009 as part of the Intellect 'Hi-Tech: Lo-Carbon' week and launched our BCS Green IT Specialist Group.

We are interested in letting other BCS groups and branches know what we do, and why ICT raises ethical issues. We have given presentations to the Consultants Specialist Group, and the Information & Technology Training Specialist Group, and at branch level – something we would like to do more of.

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<sup>1</sup> The BCS Ethics Forum home page is at: [www.bcs.org/forums/ethics](http://www.bcs.org/forums/ethics)

<sup>2</sup> The BCS Charter is available at: [www.bcs.org/Charter](http://www.bcs.org/Charter)

<sup>3</sup> Available on BCS website and at Higher Education Academy: "Professional and Ethical dimensions of emerging trends in IT: A Workshop for Practitioners and Educators" (February 2007).

<sup>4</sup> See [www.bcs.org/blogs](http://www.bcs.org/blogs) and link to 'ethics blog'

<sup>5</sup> For outputs from our work in the area of Carbon Footprint/Green IT see: [www.bcs.org/greenIT](http://www.bcs.org/greenIT)

As part of our support strategy for IT professionals we have been developing a framework for assessing ethical issues in new and emerging technologies. An overview of this work has been presented at conference and is available from our web page.

We collaborate with other BCS Forums on certain issues, for example:

- Management Forum: ICT in 2057 (BCS 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary event)<sup>6</sup>
- Engineering and Technical Forum: advice on Code of Practice (safety critical group)
- Building trust in eGovernment Working Party on Data Guardianship<sup>7</sup>

### **Working with others**

We have fostered links with other professional bodies, as members of committees, giving presentations, and offering expertise.

The BCS is one of a number of professional bodies coming under the general heading of 'engineering'. The Ethics Forum maintains close links with the Royal Academy of Engineering and subscribes to their work on ethical principles<sup>8</sup>. We have a presence on their Engineering Ethics Working Group and were involved in their event "Engineering Ethics in Practice" (2007).

We also have links with other professional bodies, such as the Professional Association of Research Networks (PARN) and have attended and given presentations at their International Conferences on ethics and IT<sup>9</sup>.

The growing emphasis from the business community on Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) highlighted the need raise awareness of the ethical role of technology in meeting ethical governance. To this end we have been working with the Institute of Business Ethics on a joint publication about ethical issues in the provision and use of IT in business (publication forthcoming 2009).

In the education arena we follow the BCS' initiatives on teaching professionalism, and have worked with Universities to advise on teaching practice in ethics and professionalism<sup>10</sup> and have given the occasional lecture.

Raising awareness of ethical aspects of information technologies extends beyond UK institutions. The role and responsibilities of IT professionals was the subject of our presentation at a UNESCO/Council of Europe regional conference "Ethics and human rights in the information society"<sup>11</sup>.

### **Supporting the BCS**

We support the recent BCS initiatives on professionalism by encouraging dialogue and providing input to the discussions taking place.

There are some issues that are of interest to other communities in the BCS. One that has received a great deal of attention in the last 18 months is personal data. We held a Thought Leadership Debate in February 2008 to ask experts in different sectors to give their views on the sharing of personal data<sup>12</sup>.

As a result of that debate we are investigating a presentation formula to provide information to members via their branches. We are working in close association with the Building Trust in

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<sup>6</sup> Short film available at: <http://www.bcs.org/server.php?show=ConWebDoc.13563>

<sup>7</sup> To see current work of this group follow link from [www.bcs.org/government](http://www.bcs.org/government)

<sup>8</sup> See Royal Academy of Engineering "Statement of Ethical Principles" at: <http://www.raeng.org.uk/policy/ethics/principles.htm>

<sup>9</sup> 2007 "Supporting Ethical Competence: What can Professional Bodies do?"  
2008 "Real world : Real People"

<sup>10</sup> Collaboration with SCEPTRE (Surrey Centre for Excellence in Professional Training and Development): input to report "Teaching Ethics to Engineering Students"

<sup>11</sup> Paper "Ethics in the environment of the information society" (Duquenoy, P. 2007) available at: <http://portal.unesco.org/ci/en/files/25453/11909027561Duquenoy-Penny.pdf/Duquenoy-Penny.pdf>

<sup>12</sup> Thought Leadership Debate in association with Worshipful Company of Information Technologists (BCS lead) January 2007: "The Ethics of Sharing Human Data" report available at: <http://www.bcs.org/server.php?show=ConWebDoc.17577>

eGovernment Group to provide this, as their work focuses on protecting personal data (through principles of data guardianship).

The BCS is regularly asked to provide input to consultation exercises from Government and other bodies. Members of the Ethics Forum provide input to these<sup>13</sup>.

## Our Working Groups

### 1. Code of Conduct and Code of Good Practice Working Group

Our working group is tasked with supporting standards through the promotion and maintenance of the BCS Code of Conduct and Code of Good Practice<sup>14</sup>. The BCS Code of Conduct sets out the minimum professional standards expected from its members in terms of high level principles. The last revision of the Code was in 2006 and some minor changes (to include relevant pieces of legislation) are anticipated.

The Code of Good Practice is intended to be a dynamic web-based document that addresses areas of work that BCS members are involved in, for example programme/project management, security, safety engineering, thus providing more specific guidance for members on issues relevant to their areas of expertise. Additions to the Code of Good Practice that are relevant to safety related software have been put forward for approval by the BCS.

To help raise awareness of the Codes we have used the ethics blog, we have talked about their relevance to professionalism in the BCS magazine ITNOW (May 2008), and will soon be rolling out short everyday scenarios that highlight the ethical decisions that we all make in our working life.

### 2. Carbon Footprint Working Group

This working group was started in July 2007 to bring together experts from the BCS (including the Communications Management Association (CMA)), industry and government in an effort to co-ordinate the emerging research in this area. With enormous support from members of the Data Centre Specialist Group<sup>15</sup> strong foundations have been laid in the complex area of measuring energy use and in setting standards with the EU Code of Conduct for Data Centres. Through the work of this group the BCS has gained a significant reputation as a body that can be called on to bring a considered and impartial approach to the often mixed messages that are bound to arise in such a new area.

Members of this group have:

- produced high level documents
- given presentations to BCS groups and external organisations
- supported Intellect and Grid Computing Now! in sponsoring a competition for students and professionals<sup>16</sup>
- contributed to the new BCS Foundation Certificate in Green IT, and from the Data Centre Specialist Group the Practitioner Certificate for Data Centre Operators<sup>17</sup>

The work continues on two projects with the Carbon Trust (simulation software tool to help companies understand the energy use within data centres, and using ICT in business to reduce carbon emissions).

Some of the outputs from this group are available on the BCS web site<sup>18</sup>.

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<sup>13</sup> For BCS consultation requests and reports see: [www.bcs.org/consultations](http://www.bcs.org/consultations)

<sup>14</sup> Available at: [www.bcs.org/Conduct](http://www.bcs.org/Conduct) and [www.bcs.org/Practice](http://www.bcs.org/Practice)

<sup>15</sup> For information see: <http://dcsg.bcs.org/>

<sup>16</sup> “Grid computing for a greener planet” [www.gridcomputingnow.org](http://www.gridcomputingnow.org)

<sup>17</sup> Details available at [www.bcs.org/greenIT](http://www.bcs.org/greenIT)

<sup>18</sup> For outputs follow the link “BCS and green IT” from: [www.bcs.org/forums/ethics](http://www.bcs.org/forums/ethics)