

7 Working with Government

'BCS is increasingly being seen as an authoritative, independent body, capable of providing informed insight into the views of IT professionals', observes Mike Rodd, BCS Director of Learned Society and External Relations (Rodd, 2004).

In the last few years the External Relations Board has coordinated submissions to government and other bodies, representing the collective view of BCS on issues as diverse as offshore outsourcing; a unified elearning strategy; developing 21st century IT support for the NHS; IT project failures in the Department for Work and Pensions; forensic examination of child pornography; ID cards; changes to the Computer Misuse Act; ecrime; proposed changes to university research funding; registration of digital evidence specialists; the Export Control Act; and the future of higher education.

RODD (2004)

More recently, BCS has responded to proposals for a new managed migration system and the Transformational Government Strategy. The views expressed on behalf of BCS, as well as the technical input, come from members, many of whom are acknowledged experts. Mike Rodd explains that the role of BCS is 'to ensure that the voices from within the Society are heard, considered, coordinated and reported in a balanced and apolitical way' (Rodd, 2004).

BCS has influenced and informed government policy over many years. BCS was instrumental in devising the whole concept of data protection, the original UK Data Protection Act in the UK and the Data Protection Directive in Europe. BCS members, as experts in their fields, are often invited onto governmental groups. Some 20 years ago, Past President Cecil Marks was a long-serving member of the Data Protection Committee, a group that worked with the Home Office and key partners in shaping the 1984 Data Protection Act. More recently Past President Wendy Hall was appointed by the Prime Minister to the Council for Science and Technology, the government's top-level advisory body on science, engineering and technology policy; and named by the European Commission as one of the founding members of the new Scientific Council of the European Research Council.

Several current government policy initiatives offer opportunities for supporting IT innovation, education, training and employment. What is missing is a joined-up approach. BCS is ideally placed to take an overview and enter a dialogue with policy makers to help bring about a coordinated and effective response.

BCS GOVERNMENT RELATIONS GROUP

The aims of the group are to:

- develop mutually beneficial relationships between BCS and government bodies;
- provide a focus for formal responses to government requests;
- initiate specific programmes of activity to advise and inform government on IT-related issues.

BCS has a professional responsibility for giving advice on IT issues to not only central government departments but also local government, parliamentary groups,

devolved assemblies and the European Union. A current priority area is liaison with the eGovernment Unit about the BCS Professionalism in IT programme (see pages 18–21).

BCS is developing its relationship with government as:

- an employer of 50,000 ICT professionals;
- a customer for BCS products and services;
- a provider of information to citizens and businesses;
- a regulator of the ICT industry;
- the creator of public policy affecting many different areas, including IT skills development in the UK and work permit policies for overseas professionals employed in the UK;
- the sponsor of a major investment programme in science and technology.

The widespread recognition of the importance of increased professionalism in IT, in which the government is playing a major role, provides a fresh opportunity for the Government Relations Group to help BCS raise its profile across the public sector. Priorities for 2006 include:

- taking forward BCS's response to the Transformational Government Strategy;
- establishing the Government Relations Group as the coordinating body and clearing point for all official submissions from BCS to government;
- developing relationships with local government;
- establishing more effective links with PITCOM and EURIM (see pages 45–6).

BOX 7.1 NAVIGATING THE NEW ECONOMY: AN INTELLECT INITIATIVE

Ensuring the UK's future as a successful, thriving and socially cohesive knowledge-driven economy is a key objective for technology trade body Intellect. As globalization accelerates, the UK needs to become both more productive and more competitive. To a large extent this will depend upon our ability to exploit and absorb the potential of technology across the public and private sectors.

Intellect is working to ensure that the knowledge economy is at the core of UK and European Union policy making. The Lisbon Agenda and, more recently, the European Commission's i2010 communication have set the broad policy framework, but a great deal needs to be done to turn these good intentions into action, and Intellect is actively engaged in many aspects of this agenda.

Benchmarking progress is key. Intellect is working with leading industry experts and academics to develop a set of metrics that will be used to measure progress towards becoming a knowledge economy. The Intellect Index Project aims to identify the gaps in the government's current measurements and to highlight additional 'new' economy indicators. It has provided an invaluable insight into the government's current data-gathering practices, looking at whether policy development is in line with the UK's knowledge economy aims or is, in fact, working against them.

Through its Innovation Nation? initiative, a joint project with *Computing* magazine, Intellect is also working to address one of the biggest challenges facing the UK: driving innovation across the public and private sectors. The project examines ways of improving the innovative exploitation and adoption of technology, in the context of

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business environment, government policies and the culture in which the UK operates. A series of three debates brought together leading CIOs, technology industry leaders, academics, opinion formers and parliamentarians and was followed by the *Innovation Nation?* report (Intellect and Computing, 2005), which provides a series of recommendations for the UK's future. The scope of required action is broad and highlights the many 'soft' issues that need addressing.

An effective intellectual property rights regime is a core component of a knowledge economy, as is an ongoing commitment to securing better regulation and reducing 'red tape'. However, it is also essential to make sure that all citizens have the skills and motivation to engage in the knowledge economy, which is why Intellect is actively participating in the development of the government's digital strategy.

For more information visit www.intellectuk.org/policy/knowledge/default.asp and www.computing.co.uk/computing/specials/2139761/innovation-nation.

This information was provided by Beatrice Rogers, Senior Programme Manager, Knowledge Economy, Intellect.

PITCOM

PITCOM is an all-party parliamentary group and was formed in 1981. It exists to encourage a clearer understanding by parliamentarians of public policy issues arising from the development and application of computing and telecommunications technologies. The group consists of 130 parliamentarians and more than 100 corporate members, including major suppliers and advanced users in the ICT industry. PITCOM has a regular programme of meetings in the Palace of Westminster, addressed by ministers, senior industry figures and experts on topical issues, followed by discussion. Further information can be found at www.pitcom.org.uk.

BCS is a corporate member of PITCOM and attends meetings to offer professional comment and advice. A recent presentation by the Minister for eGovernment gave an opportunity for the BCS President and Deputy Director of Learned Society and External Relations to provide feedback on BCS's response to the Transformational Government Strategy.

EURIM

EURIM is dedicated to ensuring that those who make the decisions hear the voices of those who are affected by ICT policy. Members include members of the House of Commons and of the House of Lords, members of the European Parliament, multinational blue-chip companies, financial institutions, broadcasters, publishers and professional bodies. EURIM's objective is to exert genuine influence on the legislative process, not just via high-level political contact, but by working with those responsible for drafting policy, particularly where it cuts across departmental boundaries. The group's aims are to:

- provide parliamentarians and other interested parties with clear, accurate and timely information on ICT-related policy proposals;
- alert parliamentarians and other interested parties to the state of the debate and the degree of support or opposition to such proposals, and to concerns over their implementation;

- ensure that views and concerns are rapidly and effectively communicated to ministers, commissioners, officials and parliamentarians in London and Brussels.
- ensure that rapid and effective action follows, where appropriate.

Further information can be found at www.eurim.org.uk. BCS is a corporate member of EURIM and the Deputy Director of Learned Society and External Relations sits on the EURIM Council. BCS is therefore well placed to contribute to EURIM debates and activities.

BOX 7.2 I2010: EUROPEAN INFORMATION SOCIETY 2010

The European Commission launched the i2010 initiative in June 2005 to foster growth and jobs in the information society and media industries. It is a comprehensive strategy for modernizing and deploying all European Union policy instruments to encourage the development of the digital economy. There are three policy priorities.

- To create an open and competitive single market for the information society and media services within the European Union:
 - supporting initiatives include an efficient spectrum management policy in Europe; modernization of the rules on audiovisual media services; an update for electronic communications regulation; a strategy for a secure information society; and effective and interoperable digital rights management.
- To increase European Union investment in ICT research by 80 per cent:
 - Europe lags behind in ICT research, investing only £55 per head compared with £242 in Japan and £276 in the USA; i2010 identifies steps to put more into ICT research and get more out of it.
- To promote an inclusive European information society:
 - an action plan on eGovernment for citizen-centred services and initiatives to overcome geographic and social digital divisions.

i2010 is a key element of the European Union's 10-year Lisbon Strategy. It focuses on the most promising sector of the European Union economy. ICT accounts for 40 per cent of Europe's productivity growth and 25 per cent of European Union gross domestic product growth (European Commission, 2005).

Speaking at a meeting in London to agree i2010 priorities, Department for Trade and Industry Minister Alun Michael said, 'It is not enough for Europe to be making progress, we have to accelerate that activity if we are going to compete with countries such as China and India' (Arnott, 2005).

Further information on i2010 can be found at europa.eu.int/information_society/eeurope/i2010/i2010/index_en.htm

BCS'S CONTRIBUTION TO GOVERNMENT POLICY ON WORK PERMITS

All overseas IT professionals from outside Europe who come to the UK to work, either on IT projects or as part of the knowledge-transfer process prior to moving work offshore, require work permits. One of the overriding principles in work permits policy is that the ease with which permits are issued to those seeking work in the UK from outside the European Economic Area depends on the level of skills shortages in relevant occupations. Producing adequate evidence of skills shortages for the many IT practitioner occupations is particularly difficult.

IT practitioner occupations were first included on the official shortage occupation

list in relation to work permits in 1999. BCS was invited in 2001 to send a representative to serve on the Sector (Advisory) Panel for IT, Communications and Electronics of Work Permits (UK), an agency reporting to the Home Office Immigration and Nationality Directorate. Qualifications and Standards Board member Matthew Dixon represents BCS on the Panel and he developed the methodology that has since been refined and adopted for determining the level of skills shortage in the UK national labour market for IT practitioner occupations. This methodology, while recognized to be far from perfect, is acknowledged to be considerably more advanced than any other known to be used in any other sector (or indeed any other country). Matthew Dixon writes about BCS's influence on work permits policy:

Probably the most significant BCS contribution to work permits policy for IT practitioner occupations came in September 2003, when the BCS-developed methodology was used to provide adequate evidence to clear the shortage list of all IT practitioner occupations. The severe shortages of 1998 and 1999 had disappeared with the bursting of the dot com bubble in 2000 and indeed many IT practitioners, including a number of BCS members, were finding work difficult to come by; yet the previous Panel arrangements had not enabled the official shortage list to be cleared. BCS has also contributed on other key issues relating to the work permits policy, including:

- aspects of implementation of the policy by Work Permits (UK) caseworkers;
- the validity of the 'labour market test' (advertising in the UK job market);
- responding to specific requests from Work Permits (UK) in relation to, for example, occupational classifications and current salary rates;
- discussions on the work permits issued to overseas IT professionals from offshore IT service providers;
- the major study carried out by the Institute for Employment Studies on the link between work permits policy and the competitiveness of the UK IT industry.

Most recently, BCS has provided a detailed response on the Home Office consultation on the proposed new managed migration strategy, which involves a number of important proposed changes to the current arrangements.

WORKING WITH THE NHS

Jean Roberts, BCS Health Informatics Forum, writes about BCS's work with the NHS:

The NHS organizations and suppliers in all the home countries are addressing the challenge of informatics in different ways. Members of the BCS Health Informatics Forum contribute to advisory groups and collectively contribute through think tanks and consultations such as the RADICAL STEPS series of initiatives.

The response or collaborative working resulting from these actions is frequently constructive, but there is a fine line between being a 'critical friend' (our aim) and being seen to be negative. The influence may be prolonged through committees and frequent (informal) consultation groups, such as the Health Informatics Partnership Group, the Health Informatics Professional Development Board and the NHS Health Informatics Faculty; or it may be in response to a request for a press comment on a significant issue, such as the Bruncefield Incident, changes in the NHS Care Records Guarantee or variations to the systems available to General Medical Practitioners. The BCS Health Informatics Forum has, with NHS colleagues, been instrumental in progressing professionalism through the establishment and ongoing support of UKCHIP.

Further information about the RADICAL STEPS initiatives can be found at www.bcs.org/BCS/Forums/health.