

Minutes of the BCS IRSG Committee Meeting

24 January 2023

Zoom Video Conference convened at 18:00 (London)

Present

Udo Kruschwitz [UK] (Chair), Tony Russell–Rose [TRR] (Vice-Chair), Steven Zimmerman [SZ] (Secretary/Minutes), Ingo Frommholz [IF] (Treasurer), Jochen Leidner [JL] , Yashar Moshfeghi [YM], Haiming Liu [HL], Graham McDonald [GM], David Rau [DR], Sean MacAvaney [SM], Monic Paramita [MP], Iadh Ounis [IO]

1. Apologies and Minutes of Previous IRSG Committee Meeting

Annalina Caputo [AC], Krisztian Balog [KB], Frank Hopfgartner [FH]

Agreed Minutes approved

Discussion around constitution and ex-officio attendance. SZ reports there is nothing in the constitution to prevent this.

Agreed MW can attend our meetings as ex-officio member

2. Actions arising from Nov 2022

Action Number	Action	Action on
Nov 22.01	Set up document repository for committee documents on Basecamp. SZ to work with Kerry Weir to do this. CARRY FORWARD Jan 23.01	SZ
Nov 22.02	Explore ideas for expanding diversity CARRY FORWARD Jan 23.02	YM
Nov 22.03	Send [GM] any events, postings, etc that might be relevant	DONE
Nov 22.04	Send out call for 1-day events once we have clarity on budget CARRY FORWARD. Jan 23.03 SEE ALSO AGENDA ITEM 15	UK
Nov 22.05	Switch to bi-annual publication with [MW] acting as editor	DONE
Nov 22.06	Udo to send around report from Michael Upshall SEE REPORT IN APPENDIX OF MINUTES	DONE
Nov 22.07	Contact BCS to determine if possible for members to approach new/recent members CARRY FORWARD Jan 23.04	HL
Nov 22.08	Follow up with chair and community coordinator	GM
Nov 22.09	Look at constitution to determine if ex-officio member can sit in meetings i.e. [MW] would attend as ex-officio	SZ

Nov 22.10	Send out doodle poll for next meeting	UK
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3. Items Agreed by email

No items agreed by email

1830 YM and MW join

4. Chair's report

UK welcomed IO as a new committee member representing the ECIR 2024 co-chairs.

1838 TRR joins

Discussion around ECIR A Core ranking. Most conferences listed in the CORE rankings will be reassessed this year. We have also been approached regarding ECIR (currently ranked A). This was just an initial email (for flagging this up to people who had been involved in previous submissions to the CORE list) with details being made available later for submission compiling a range of statistics around ECIR sometime between March and May.

UK suggested that a committee member should drive this and SM volunteered. Craig Macdonald had indicated that he is happy to support this process and provide tools for collecting the necessary statistics.

Action Jan 23.05 - [SM] to handle the ECIR core submission which includes the following sub-tasks:

1. Connect with Craig Macdonald who oversaw the initial core ranking, to determine specific requirements
2. Connect with [UK] to get list of existing papers for submission
3. To compile everything for the submission
4. Coordinate the work with the IRSG chair

UK informed that there will be elections for Specialist Groups constituency vacancies on BCS Council. He suggested that on behalf of the IRSG he would vote for Liz Stuart who seems to be the best fit for our group. This was agreed unanimously.

Action Jan 23.06 - [UK] to put forth vote for specialist group nominee

Discussion around a wider Communication strategy [MW] raising following points/questions:

- No visibility on BCS website
- What should our longer-term communication strategy look like?

- What is our membership and what is our base?
- What is the ratio of Academics to Practitioners?

Action Jan 23.07 - [HL] to ask Kerry Weir for numbers on other member groups to rank against ours

Action Jan 23.08 - [HL] to put a survey together to understand our membership base and share with IRSG community.

UK reported that he had discussed with Nicola Ferro, Christine Bauer and others the idea of closer alignment between the three annual events ECIR, ESSIR (with FDIA) and CLEF. This is something that the IRSG could get involved in and would present an opportunity to foster support of early-career researchers in our community and could focus on mentorship. An idea is to leverage the cycle of ESSIR, CLEF, ECIR, and FDIA to have mentorship throughout.

GM, YM, HL, IF volunteered to explore this further with Nicola and Christine.

Action Jan 23.09a - [UK] to connect [GM, YM, HL, IF] with Nicola Ferro and Christina Bauer.

Action Jan 23.09b - [GM, YM, HL, IF] to discuss mentorship with Nicola Ferro and Christina Bauer

UK reported that the PC chairs of ECIR 2023 were involved in a case of academic misconduct, essentially a paper had been submitted to several IR venues in parallel without disclosing it. It was agreed that the authors should be banned from submitting to ECIR for one year. This is in line with recommendations proposed by other organisers involved in this case. The committee agreed that this is a sensible course of action.

Action Jan 23.10 - [UK] to connect ECIR 2024 general chairs with Jaap Kamps (PC co-chair of ECIR 2023)

1915 MW logs off

5. Report Inclusion Officer

[YM] No response on Doodle to our group. Speaking with other inclusion officers at BCS to understand what they do

Discussion: Inclusion topic was brought up with respect to ECIR. ECIR is traditionally held during Passover/Easter period. Is this exclusionary? How big of an issue? We know of some cases where researchers do not attend ECIR due to the timing

Action Jan 23.11 - [UK] to include in the Call for ECIR bids a statement about how to mitigate inclusionary issues such as religious holidays (e.g. virtual presentation)

6. Report Early Careers Advocate

Nothing specific to report. The LinkedIn group has gone quiet. No new posts since our last meeting.

7. ECIR 2023

UK reported the following:

- Organisation of ECIR 2023 is progressing well
- Looks like the biggest ECIR in terms of accepted papers
- There will be an in-person event (the usual slot) preceded by a virtual event the week before for those authors that cannot travel (the virtual event comes with its own dedicated keynote talk)
- Sponsorship has been more tricky this year as many tech companies have decided to cut back
- Together with the massive increase in costs in Dublin this means that the registration fees for authors of accepted papers were higher than had been hoped (to break even each paper had to have at least one full registration)

8. ECIR 2024

GM requests that UK to send lessons learned from organising ECIR 2023

Action Jan 23.12 - [UK] to send [GM] summary of experiences with details on ECIR 2023 sponsorship

Action Jan 23.13 - [UK] to send details on publication process such as Springer contacts

[IO] reports the following

- Slack setup for all PC chairs
- Website should be up in February
- Looking at Sponsorship

9. Search Solutions 2022

Action Jan 23.14 - [IF] to get final numbers to share with group

Action Jan 23.15 - [UK] to upload slides to BCS website (for slides that can be shared)

10. Search Solutions 2023

[TRR] Reports

- [MW and TRR] agree to having stricter timelines
- Get message out before summer and end of June

Action Jan 23.16 - [IF] to contact Kerry Weir to schedule rooms

Agreed to 2023 committee - IF, MW, TRR, UK, SZ, MP (anybody else interested should contact UK)

11. KSJ Award

[JL] reports the following:

- the KSJ award 2022 will be given to Professor William Wang (UC Santa Barbara).
- JL has informed him, and he has confirmed he will give a keynote at ECIR 2023 (he just needs to update his passport)
- JL has ordered a trophy and name engraving with shipment destination Dublin, but the company cannot ship from the UK to Dublin due to Brexit.
- HL has therefore kindly volunteered to receive the trophy in the UK and take it to Dublin/the conference.

Action Jan 23.17 - [JL] will share the KSJ paperwork with [HL] as part of their handover of the role of KSJ award chair; as part of that, both will check when the funding provided by Microsoft Research will expire.

12. ICTIR report

[FH] nothing to report

13. Strix Award

[GM] Reports the following

- The panel met to agree on the recipients. This year there are two winners of the award: Iadh Ounis and Ryan White. The winners have been announced and the lectures will be held on the afternoon of Thursday 23rd February 2023.
- The announcement was sent to IR@Jiscmail and SIGIR@Listserve and tweeted from the IRSG account. GM also tweeted from his personal account. I will send out reminders about the talks through these channels also.
- Please attend the talks if you can. It is important that IRSG is well represented. You can register for the talks here: <https://www.cilip.org.uk/events/EventDetails.aspx?id=1710573&group=2013>

14. Budget

[IF] reports

- £1008 from 2020/2021 made available for us to use
- Need to submit a use case. FDIA/ESSIR are two candidates

15. Call for one-day events

Discussion on options.

- [TRR] put forth 3 ideas
 - a. Helen Lippell Taxonomy event (she is keen to run one)
 - b. Search Network to put on a practitioner event
 - c. Join efforts with ISKO
- [JL] suggests having a mainland event

Action Jan 23.18 - [TRR/HL] to discuss options and possibility of hosting at Southampton

Action Jan 23.19 - [TRR] To put together call for one-day event

16. Informer

Discussion Informer: MW will put forth 2 issues this year. We still need to get someone beyond 2023. Will be focusing on template / platform strategy in coming months.

Action Jan 23.20 - [TRR & MW] to look at Medium as new platform. Plan to run a parallel PoC with April issue.

17. AGM 2023

Action Jan 23.21 - [ALL] bring forth ideas to hold AGM at alternative time/venue. 2022 approach to holding AGM at end of SS 2022 did not work well (low attendance, people tired, etc).

18. AOB

None

19. Next meeting

Next meeting TBD

Action Jan 23.22 - [UK] to send out a Doodle poll for the next meeting.

20. Actions Arising From Meeting

Action Number	Action	Action on
Jan 23.01	Set up document repository for committee documents on Basecamp. SZ to work with Kerry Weir to do this.	SZ
Jan 23.02	Explore ideas for expanding diversity	YM
Jan 23.03	Send out call for 1-day events once we have clarity on budget	UK
Jan 23.04	Contact BCS to determine if possible for members to approach new/recent members	HL
Jan 23.05	Handle the ECIR core submission in collaboration with UK	[SM]
Jan 23.06	Put forth vote for specialist group nominee	[UK]
Jan 23.07	Ask Kerry Weir for numbers on other member groups to rank against ours	[HL]

Jan 23.08	Put a survey together to understand our membership base and share with IRSG community.	[HL]
Jan 23.09	[UK] to connect [GM, YM, HL, IF] to discuss mentorship with Nicola Ferro and Christina Bauer	[UK, GM, YM, HL, IF]
Jan 23.10	Connect ECIR 2024 general chairs with Jaap Kamps (PC co-chair of ECIR 2023)	[UK]
Jan 23.11	Include in the Call for ECIR bids a statement about how to mitigate inclusionary issues such as religious holidays (e.g. virtual presentation)	[UK]
Jan 23.12	[UK] to send [GM] summary of experiences with ECIR 2023 sponsorship	[UK, GM]
Jan 23.13	Send details on publication process such as Springer contacts	[UK]
Jan 23.14	Get final numbers to share with group	[IF]
Jan 23.15	Upload slides to BCS website (for slides that can be shared)	[UK]
Jan 23.16	Contact Kerry Weir to schedule rooms	[IF]
Jan 23.17	Share the KSJ paperwork with [HL] as part of their handover of the role of KSJ award chair; as part of that, both will check when the funding provided by Microsoft Research will expire.	[JL, HL]
Jan 23.18	Discuss options and possibility of hosting at Southampton	[TRR/HL]
Jan 23.19	Put together call for one-day event	[TRR]
Jan 23.20	Look at Medium as a new platform for Informer. Plan to run a parallel PoC with the April issue.	[TRR & MW]
Jan 23.21	Bring forth ideas to hold AGM at an alternative time/venue. 2022 approach to holding AGM at end of SS 2022 did not work well (low attendance, people tired, etc).	[ALL]
Jan 23.22	Send out a Doodle poll for the next meeting.	[UK]

Meeting Closed 20:03

APPENDIX

BCS IRSG Informer Report Sept 2022

Michael Upshall 22 September 2022

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Outline

Martin White is not easily replaced as editor of Informer. This report is to review the role of Informer, and, more broadly, the role of digital content for the IRSG. To that end, I have started with the goals of the group overall, before assessing to what extent Informer meets those goals, and finally providing specific recommendations.

This report is a very rough and ready overview, and should be followed up with more detailed analysis.

Goals of IRSG

From the website: “If you work with search engines, develop or deploy search technology, have a research interest in the field, or if you simply want to learn more about Search, then we will be happy to welcome you to our group! We bring together industry, academia and end users with interests in web, professional, intranet, enterprise and ecommerce search”.

In other words: search, discovery, recommenders, intranets, covering both theory and practice. This is a wide brief. Anything from Amazon to Tesco to Oxford University Press to PubMed, as well as Information and IT departments should have an interest in the activities of IRSG. Users will include:

1. Industry – businesses buying and selling search tools
2. Academia – academics, researchers, undergraduates
3. Libraries – Informer used to include details of digital library conferences.

As for market area, the group is worldwide, although largely restricted to English language tools.

To what extent does IRSG meet these goals?

The goals of IRSG are clear, but I don't think the current site delivers adequately in any of the above areas. There is little involvement from industry, and the site is not very useful helping academics keep up with the subject. What is done is done well, but my feeling is that only a small proportion of the total market is covered.

The industry and competition

Information Retrieval comprises several linked but distinct markets:

1. Search (market size estimate \$100m 2020)
2. Recommendation Engines (market size estimated \$170m 2020)
3. SEO (market size estimated \$46m 2020)
4. Intranets (market size estimated \$128m 2019)

However approximate these figures, it is clear there is a lot of money in search. Packt Publishing, a mid-size publisher of computing content, has over 50 books with "search", "Elasticsearch" or "Solr" in the title.

Academic publishing

The IRSG website lists 35 journals related to information retrieval. I'm sure this is an underestimate. From the list of journals including the term "information" in their title (105, not all relevant), I could see, for example, the CILIP "Journal of Information Literacy", and the "International Journal of Information Science and Management", within a few minutes.

There were 1,110 articles containing "information retrieval" published in 2021; 57 articles with "recommendation engine" in the title; 548 articles with "SEO" or "Search Engine Optimization" in 2021; 122 articles with "internet" in the title. It would be a challenge for any practitioner to keep up with all the new articles in this space; these terms (which are probably mutually exclusive) mean any academic or practitioner has to read between one and 20 new articles each week to keep up with the relevant field. There is clearly a need for assistance in identifying relevant content for the IR community. For preprints, a search for articles published in the last 12 months tagged as "CS.IR" retrieved 2,489 articles. "IR" is a secondary category for information retrieval within computer science.

Conferences

Academics and professionals find information via conferences, articles, and interest groups. These include:

- SIGIR – annual event by ACM. They publish a twice-yearly newsletter, plus the conference proceedings. The committee look US focused, even if the SIGIR Conference is global.
- Haystack (Open-source only)
- Text Retrieval Conference (TREC)
- ECIR
- ICTIR
- Search Solutions. This event includes both tutorials and presentations.

There are several others. SIGIR runs reports on events, but better might be succinct summaries of papers. Conferences are good at presenting individual papers, but give little idea of the current state of knowledge in an area. This is a role that SIGIR or IRSG could provide. As a practitioner in Search and discovery, I am potentially interested in the academic conferences, but I have no interest in browsing through conference proceedings. I would need a service to make some of this more accessible.

Mailing lists

- SIGIR maintain an IR mailing list.
- The IRSG has a mailing list on JISCMail.

There are no doubt others. Mailing lists are antiquated, but still useful sources of information – they should be monitored and reported regularly outside the mailing lists. I suspect the userbase for mailing lists is aging steadily.

Other sites and services of interest

Scholarly Kitchen

A model of an effective blog operation for a practitioner community. They have around 7,700 subscribers, and 70,000 visits per month. Reasons for its success:

1. Many viewpoints
2. Authoritative contributors, each of whom is expected to provide 6 posts per year
3. They publish daily, which is not really feasible for IRSG. I would aim for weekly (ideally) or fortnightly.

Search Engine Watch

Founded 1997. Formerly independent, now venture-capital backed. Indicates the money in this sector.

Search Engine Journal

Highly commercial, with advertising. 3.1m visits per month

LSE Blogs

The LSE publish a wide range of blogs, for example, the Impact of Social Sciences. These blogs comprise largely readable summaries of academic articles of interest. Here is [an example](#):

Corina MacDonald

September 14th, 2022

Open Access and the enduring myths of the long 1990s

1 comment | 5 shares

Estimated reading time: 7 minutes



From the dawn of the popular internet in the 1990s to the present day, Open Access (OA) to scholarly research has been a goal for many researchers and advocates. Drawing on research into the early OA discourse of the 1990s, Corina MacDonald argues that many of the original optimistic arguments in favour of open access continue to shape open access to this day, often in ways that obscure the reality of digital networked labour.

This blog therefore provides a way of disseminating research through non-traditional channels.

Review of current IRSG site

The IRSG has an exceptionally welcoming and involved committee, with excellent contacts, mainly across the academic community. Conferences and events are worth attending. However, the website is not as impressive as face-to-face interactive events.

- It does not appear that the group is tracking usage of the site via Google Analytics.
- It seems the current site requires the involvement of two committee members (MW and TRR) to get content posted. I have not enquired further, but the process sounds very labour-intensive.
- It takes several clicks for users who search for BCS-IRSG (not the simplest of searches) to reach Informer.
- Google will not know what "Informer" is.
- It was originally named "Informer" back in 1994 "to inform you of what's going on in IR and the IRSG". That explains why, but such a title is meaningless to outsiders.
- If you don't know the newsletter is called "Informer", there is nothing to tell you what it is; and it is positioned below awards and governance on the website, which is unlikely to be ranked by traffic levels:

More from the Information Retrieval specialist group

[Awards](#)

[Governance](#)

[Conferences and events](#)

[Informer](#)

[Resources](#)

- Why is “Informer” placed after “awards” and “governance” – who cares about those?
- Where are case studies? The one ECIR Industry day I attended had a number of fascinating case studies.
- Posts have no pictures. Current practice is for posts to have some kind of visual angle.
- The search box on the site does not appear to work (!) I searched for “Wikipedia”, but I can see no mention of Wikipedia in the hits that are displayed. This made it impossible to check the site, for example, for topicality (to see if it mentions aspects of AI in information retrieval, for example).
- Why is Informer quarterly? The format has not changed since 1994 (the oldest issue on the archive). Quarterly might meet a volunteer’s available time, but is of little relevance to academics or to practitioners.
- It is difficult to see what the trending topics on the site are. I would look for terms such as “summarization”, “sentiment analysis”, but I cannot on the present website.
- Without access to Google Analytics, it is not so easy to get usage stats for the current site. However, here are some indicators.
 - Traffic is around 1700 visits per month (similar to other member-based groups such as UKeiG). Commercial sites in this area have much larger traffic, for example, [Search Engine Journal](#) has 3.1m hits per month.
 - Top search term on the IRSG site is “mobile search”
 - I cannot see which posts are most read.

Home page

- “categories” are not the most important filter
- “tags” are not very helpful either

Who posts?

Martin White is responsible for 34% of all posts on the IRSG site. Four other contributors have contributed more than 10 posts. In other words, this site is not representative of its users. Martin is a unique resource; this does not mean that other people can be found who can single-handedly manage such a vast area. Nor should such an important resource be in the hands of so few people.

Some topics that were covered in earlier years of Informer include:

- Details of conferences (often with full details of submissions)
- Research studentships
- Job opportunities

I don't think any of these (other than brief details of conferences, with a calendar) should be reinstated.

Recommendations

1. Change the IRSG group name to something less forbidding. "Information Retrieval Specialist Group" is not catchy. How about just "Information Retrieval Group"? It's not just for specialists.
2. Change "Informer" to something more catchy – how about "Finder", or "SearchandFind"? This resource is, after all, not just for group members. Have a dedicated URL for the site.
3. Consider raising revenue to pay for some of the Informer / IRSG services. I estimate the features below could require 5 hours per week, 250 hours per year, around £10K per year if paid. Enable direct membership of IRSG (SIGIR costs \$30 per year, ISKO costs €60 pa)
4. Create a profile for members when they renew membership, similar to the [SIGIR profile questionnaire](#):

Professional Member Profile

By providing the information requested, you will help ACM to better understand the composition of our computing community. This information will help us to identify areas that require improvement. This information is for ACM use only and will only be used in aggregate form, and ACM will never share your personal profile information. (ACM's [Privacy Policy](#)).

What is your age group?*

Prefer not to say 46-55
 17 and under 56-65
 18-25 66-75
 26-35 76+
 36-45

To which gender identity do you most identify?*

Prefer not to say
 Female
 Male
 Non-Binary
 Prefer to Self-Describe

Primary Job Function If necessary, you may select two Job Functions.*

5. Presence on social media (I would limit this to LinkedIn and Twitter)
 - a. Add a LinkedIn home page
 - b. Repost all posts on LinkedIn
 - c. Tweet details of all new posts
6. Publish more frequently on the site – every week.
7. Set up regular analytics reporting, to provide management information to the committee on use of the website and Informer on a monthly basis. Stats to report will be, e.g. traffic on website, time on site, no of pages viewed per session, most-read posts.
8. Update the website to something current, most likely the latest available version of WordPress.
 - a. Require images for every post
 - b. Include "reading time" for every post (via a WordPress plug-in)
 - c. Add a subscribe option.
9. Have the annual conference as face-to-face but also virtual.

10. Potentially, add a new service for summaries of academic papers. Such summaries are not available on preprint servers, but could be a starting point for IRSG. Add more content to the site by providing summaries of recent academic articles, similar to the LSE Impact of Social Sciences blog. The authors themselves could be responsible for creating the summary. It should be possible to create an editorial committee within the IRSG to identify relevant articles. Alternatively, facilitate community-led posts about new content, along the lines of the Company of Biologists [PreLights](#) service.
11. Provide a service for abstracts and short descriptions of theses and master's dissertations in the area of information retrieval?
12. Have a joint conference with Haystack. This would make sure each group is aware of the other. There is potentially high overlap between the memberships. Report regularly on Haystack on the Informer site.
13. Raise revenue by providing paid training courses. Currently, these courses are largely owned by ALPSP and UKSG. IRSG already runs training courses on the day before the annual conference; these could be extended.
14. Diversity: ensure there is wider representation of authors and contributors (requires a committee discussion)
15. Provide a regular "What's happening in search?" column, similar in some ways to the excellent input from Karen Blakeman keeping track of Google search services and functionality over the years
16. Join MemberWise UK, a body for member-based organisations (free).
17. Contact Jon Jefferys, head of communities at BCS, so see if any other groups have particular success in interacting with members (I have set up a meeting)
18. Contact David Watkins, web editor, ISKO UK to share notes on member-based website and CMS.