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IN CONFIDENCE

SCIENCE AND ENGINEERING RESEARCH COUNCIL
RUTHERFORD APPLETON LABORATORY

COMPUTING DIVISION

D I S T R I B U T E D C O M P U T I N G N O T E 6 1 4

VISITS

issued by
D A Duce

Notes on a meeting with Prof D Edwards and
B Oakley, Garrick House, London - 1 April 1982

22 April 1982

DISTRIBUTION: R W Witty
D A Duce
Investigators/Gurd and Watson

PRESENT: Prof D Edwards (Manchester)
B Oakley
Dr D Worsnip
Dr D A Duce

The purpose of the meeting was to explore the issues raised by the suggestion that DEC may wish to formally collaborate with the Manchester Dataflow project.

Prof Edwards gave the background to the present situation.

John Gurd was in Oregon for a Workshop last week. He was invited to spend a day at DEC's Hudson plant and spent an afternoon discussing the dataflow project with Bell, Fuller, Dobez and someone else concerned with DEC/university liaison. DEC are known to be keen to extend cooperation into Europe.

Subsequently Professor Wilkes visited Manchester. He came as an emissary from DEC Europe, to see the work going on in the Department. He is visiting several European Universities on behalf of DEC's European manager. He spent a full day in Manchester and talked with several project teams.

The Manchester approach has always been that whatever they design, they want to get made. Experience has shown that catching an interest early and developing it is the best approach. Despite visits to the dataflow project by Scarrot, Iliffe and Leekie, the only positive interest has come from DEC. DEC seem to have identified two areas

where dataflow might make an impact; tracking (VLSI or PCB) and logic simulation. Dobez has tried some experiments using the machine with tracking algorithms and the results are encouraging. He is now spending time converting Bell to the view that dataflow merits examinations. The Manchester view is that they would like the scientific experiment started with DEC to grow. They are aware that things could escalate rapidly and want to clear the way ahead first.

There was a confidential discussion of the relationship between ICL and Manchester. Professor Edwards' view was that it was not possible to talk of collaboration until the law suite is settled. Mr Oakley's view was that a way to break through the present deadlock needs to be found. Mr Oakley would talk to Mr Wilmott.

Mr Oakley's initial reaction to the DEC approach was that if DEC are genuinely setting up an R&D team at Reading it would be difficult to say that collaboration with them is not the sensible thing to do. Other potential collaborators would seem to be GEC, and Ferranti, and ICL thought it was appreciated that ICL might express interest whilst really pushing DAP. Dr Duce explained that negotiations with GEC through Roger Newey seemed to have reached a stage of deadlock at a high level in the company.

Professor Edwards explained how DEC might escalate the experiments with Manchester. Essentially they would support the project with hardware (a VAX front-end linked to Reading by DECnet), they would make copies of the machine and probably supply re-engineered components. They would probably supply extra store for the switch and matching store. Professor Edwards felt DEC would not be prepared to pay for additional staff posts. Modest consultancy fees would be paid to Drs Gurd and Watson in respect of the extra time they would put into the project. Dr Duce explained the plans to connect the machine to SERCnet (or PSS) through the front end machine. One possible option would be to have 2 front end machines!

DEC would certainly persue the routing and simulation applications. These are linked to DEC's CAD software and the manufacturing plant at Hudson (Jack Dennis has access to this).

Mr Oakley wondered if the SERC community would get access to the software developed and in particular to the DEC CAD suite. It was not obvious that this would be part of the deal. Manchester clearly have a need to access good CAD software since access to the ICL software was removed.

Mr Oakley felt that the real difficulty was that DEC have a bad track record in dealing with the UK government. However, if the move to set up R&D activity in the UK was serious, the DoI attitude to collaboration was likely to be relaxed. He agreed that from Manchester's point of view it was difficult to resist the DEC approaches. Mr Oakley had formally sought the DoI view and awaited a reply. He would contact Professor Edwards when a reply was received.

Professor Edwards reiterated that Manchester were keen to escalate the experiment with DEC, as far as could be ascertained GEC were not interested and Manchester were suspicious of ICL's motives.

Actions

1. Mr Oakley to discuss Manchester position with Mr Wilmott.

2. Dr Worsnip had contacted NRDC to see if the dataflow macine was covered by patents. NRDC were now primed to visit Manchester immediately. It was agreed this would not be helpful and Dr Worsnip was to ask NRDC to hold off.

3. Dr Worsnip to talk to Mr Clarke (GEC) to see if anything can be done to clear blockage in GEC.