

my DTC file

SCIENCE AND ENGINEERING RESEARCH COUNCIL
RUTHERFORD APPLETON LABORATORY

COMPUTING DIVISION

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Visit to Brooking at Poly of South Bank
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Investigators/Brooking file

(see next page)

1. PURPOSE

Annie Brooking is Director of the Knowledge Based Systems Centre at the Polytechnic of the South Bank (PSB). She has managed to get money from foreign sources for various projects and is anxious to get more involved in the UK programme and had asked for a visit to discuss what the Centre has to offer.

2. BACKGROUND

Brooking has a background in commercial computing at a low technical level and in teaching computing in colleges. When she came to PSB she said something should be done to stimulate computing there and proposed a centre for applied AI that would create an environment for new developments. The Director of the PSB, John Beishon, gave her support for a year and told her to get money into the Poly to offset their diminishing support. Brooking seems to be good at getting money from people and has got a number of projects underway (see below). The PSB have given her a site with plenty of room and her group has access to VAX/UNIX, VAX/VMS and DEC10/TOPS10 computing facilities. Her personal interest is systems design and methodology.

None of the people who have joined the group have any experience of AI. They are people from a whole range of relevant disciplines (Maths, psychology etc) with some computing experience. A three month seminar course is run for new members of the group to give them a basic grounding in AI and teach them LISP.

3. ESPRIT PROJECT

20 proposals for IKBS pilot projects were submitted to ESPRIT and Brooking's was one of the three awarded. A copy of the project proposal is in the file. The project is a study of methodology for design and implementation of expert systems. The whole project is for 40 MY over 5 years, the pilot project has received 120K.

Brooking tried to get a collaboration with GEC and Martin Merry gave some encouragement. But when GEC saw the full proposal they said it was far too ambitious and withdrew. The project therefore has no industrial partner. The University of Amsterdam are the only other collaborators.

The project is aimed at a methodology for building today's expert systems with today's technology. They are covering three areas on the pilot project:- hardware and implementation languages, Interfaces (MMI), and 'Learning'. On the first, they are surveying single user machines ICL are lending a PERQ and Symbolics a LISP machine; they are trying to become a test site for DEC for Common Lisp. The man doing the survey has no AI background. They have a psychologist working on the MMI with a particular interest in iconic interfaces. The 'Learning' part is at the moment a survey of the literature on machine learning, rule induction etc.

Although the whole project is about design and methodology there is no software engineering awareness. WPS stressed that they should at least use the AI Catalogue seriously as a framework for their work.

4. OTHER PROJECTS

SORD have given the centre 25K p.a. plus several micros for CAL work. There is no AI content in the project. The people doing the project have some interest in getting into CAI from an IKBS direction.

Applied Technology is a small software house that has put in ½MY just to keep a foot in the door.

STC are putting a man in for 3 months to learn about AI, and are interested in an ES for fault diagnosis in telephone exchanges.

Brooking was involved in the ICL Alvey demonstrator proposal to the extent of making some comments on the proposal.

5. FUTURE PROJECTS

- (1) The STC project is already defined as a potential demonstrator in the IKBS report so they should put in a letter to Alvey expressing interest in it.
- (2) They want to build an ES and will work up a proposal in the short term development category.
- (3) They will join in the Expert Systems research theme.

6. SUMMARY

They are a very inexperienced group trying to grow very quickly, which clearly has its dangers. They have no results to show yet and it is too early to judge whether they can achieve anything. However, they are getting good response from industrial contacts and are certainly in a better position than many companies trying to 'grow their own' expertise.