

Changes at the BAA

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A little bit of history

Toward the end of 2007 and the start of 2008, the British Computer Society announced changes to the way in which it manages and runs its Specialist Groups, which included, of course, the BAA. These changes were wide-ranging and had various knock-on effects. Perhaps the most obvious and controversial change was the requirement for all SG members to be members of the BCS.

In the particular case of the BAA, where many of our members are retired from mainstream work or are based abroad, BCS membership would offer few advantages for them and additional expense; even though the first year's membership would be free.

More fundamental however were growing demands from the BCS of the BAA organisational committee, which prevented us from running our organisation in the way we wanted on behalf of the APL community. The restrictions placed upon us were seen to be increasingly obtrusive, right down to how we print *Vector* and to whom we may distribute it.

After much heartfelt discussion, we held a ballot of the members on a resolution to end our affiliation to the BCS. We announced at our EGM on 19 June that this resolution had been passed. The voting was 184 in favour and 1 against. To get so many APLers all agreeing with each other is a rare event indeed and only goes to show the depth of feeling and importance of the issues under debate.

There remains one outstanding issue regarding the BCS: our funds, which remain behind closed doors whilst we negotiate their return to us. There are all sorts of legal issues surrounding the 'ownership' of the funds which I shall not detail here other than to say that we consider the funds to be ours and that we will fight vigorously to recover them. Until this issue is resolved we aim to run the BAA with a starting bank balance of zero. With the continuing, and generous, support of our Sustaining Members we should have working capital very shortly.

Now we are independent and responsible for our own destiny or demise.

So, what happens now?

Well, immediately the decision to de-affiliate was made we had to change our Regulations accordingly and as a result identified a number of additional areas which were now somewhat out of date. Richard Nabavi and Anthony Camacho have volunteered to investigate and report back with suggested updates.

We have decided not to change too much, too quickly. We plan to move forward with care, keep existing initiatives in place where possible and build confidence from our membership in our abilities. Your committee remains largely unchanged from pre-BCS days but with the addition of Chris Hogan who will be auditing our accounts going forward.

At the time of writing we had nearly completed the process of opening a new bank account for the BAA but unfortunately, due to the money-laundering laws in the UK, this takes a long time. Once this account is up and running we can start to collect fees again and have a financial base from which to work. I am sure Nicholas Small will be in touch soon!

We continue to produce *Vector* as before and in fact plan to produce even more varied copy and output over the future months. *Vector* 23:4 is due to go to press by the end of September; just in time for the conference season. Stephen Taylor continues to work on our production process to make the whole thing faster, more streamlined and less reliant on individuals. We hope that you will see a more reliable delivery over the coming years with content from a variety of new (and old) sources.

Over the past months we have been changing our web site so as to deliver a more dynamic content – “as it happens”, so to speak. We would encourage all of our members to have a look around the site and let us know what is good, or bad, and maybe provide some useful content for the future. This site is often the first point of contact for APL entrants and so we are very keen to ensure that the content provides for all needs. The ‘Community’ section provides for all sorts of links to related material, people, associations etc. Please help us add to it and keep it up to date. Thanks to Ian Clark for all of his efforts in getting the *Vector* back issues into the archive.

A proposal has been put forward to try and produce additional booklets from time to time using much of the scattered material already available. We hope therefore to bring to you some new literature over the months, bundled in with your *Vector*, which will be informative and build into a useful reference library over time. Some of you may well be asked to provide us with some ‘ingredients’ for our Celebrity APL Cookbook!

In the coming months we will be looking at things such as the fee structure and amounts, individual roles and responsibilities plus the recruitment of new blood into our committee structure. I consider this essential to get that dynamism back into the group and to start investigating new avenues of involvement.

Prior to our de-affiliation we had plans to hold a 2-day conference in London early next year. I would still like to see this go ahead, as in my view, a BAA-led conference is long overdue. Exactly what we can do on this front will depend upon our working capital etc. but, at the moment, consider 2-3 March 2009 as the possible date. More information on this will be forthcoming once our funding position with BCS is resolved.

Various other projects remain in-hand; work on the Vector Archive continues; Kai Jaeger expands the APL Wiki ever further and we support him where we can. We remain in contact with other associations particularly SIGAPL who also are renegotiating their relationship with their governing board (ACM SGB).

Finally, we scrapped the blog on our website and now use the `comp.lang.apl` newsgroup to post messages and questions out to the APL world: this seemed to be one of the most appropriate and vendor-independent mechanisms easily available. Since we have started, this group is now at its most active for 10 years. If you haven't looked for a while, log on and have a read – or even post a comment.

In summary

Far from a gloomy outlook, I see the coming months as very exciting. The APL community seems to have woken up in the past year or so and our challenge is to keep up! We must feed new information and ideas through to the community and ensure that initiatives do not fall by the wayside.

That challenge is great but then so too is the BAA. (Urgh – I've just come over feeling rather ill!)