

University cuts bring defenders to Salford

From Dr John Slater

Your editorial 'Hypocritical squeals over university cuts' prompts a response in defence of those many organisations (including some computing ones) who have joined in the campaign to promote the University of Salford called Campus. I believe that, contrary to the views you expressed, supporters of Campus hold to the view that Salford, and other technological universities, constitute a valuable and valued part of the community with an important role to play in any national economic recovery.

The loss of 'research and consultancy services' which the university offers to industry cannot sensibly be de-

scribed as 'short term damage to the pockets' of the firms using them: research rarely brings immediate profit and the firm commissioning it is, in a real sense, out of pocket. Nor has the computing service at Salford bought equipment from any of the firms mentioned, although we are negotiating a possible collaborative software product with one of them. Thus, I am at a loss to understand your assertion that the firms mentioned will lose revenue due to the cuts imposed on Salford University.

You include in the editorial a familiar sentiment concerning the data processing industry's dislike of the computing education provided at universities. Without entering into this argument, it is worth pointing out that Salford has no formal computer science department; does teach its undergraduates business computing techniques; has, for some time, included formal training in, for instance, Cobol as a part of degree

courses; and has little difficulty placing its students in the computer industry. Thus it is consistent, rather than hypocritical, for computer manufacturers to join Campus.

While being aware that you did not directly attack Salford in your editorial, I am nevertheless concerned by the effect that you may have in promoting the misunderstandings perpetrated therein.

Among other projects the Computing Laboratory at Salford is extending the applicability of a Fortran 77 compiler that has already been sold to one major manufacturer; taking an active role in the definition, promulgation and machine independent coding of the JTM protocol standards; producing a new version of our part of a major commercial graphics suite and has recently completed a portability study on contract to the US National Bureau of Standards.

The UK computer industry, along with other indus-

tries, does benefit from its contact with universities, and especially technological ones. It does not benefit from your editorial.

Dr John B Slater, deputy director, Computing Laboratory, University of Salford, Salford M5 4WT.

No welcome at university for industry

From Colin Tully

Congratulations on your pungent and perceptive editorial of July 30, 'Hypocritical squeals over university cuts'. It went to the heart of the issue, which is the failure of universities and industry to work together in this country. The failure has lain, on both sides, in a narrow preoccupation with established ways of doing things, and a consequent inability to see the mutual benefit and national

strategic value of determined long-term collaboration.

It is not much use engaging in recriminations or acrimony about the present cuts or the UGC's implementation of them, or even Salford's dire fate. It is probably the case (though the details have yet to emerge) that information technology has survived the exercise relatively unscathed overall. If that is so, the temptation is to sigh with relief that things could have been worse, and to sink back to re-embrace the status quo.

On the contrary, now is the moment to seek a significant and carefully planned expansion of university capacity in information technology teaching and research. How can we (a) depend on information technology to contribute in a big way to our economic regeneration, (b) observe our desperate shortages of highly skilled manpower and our desperately slow rate of innovation, and (c) not conclude that universities must play a vital part in any national strategy? I argued in a paper at BCS81 that the DoI must collaborate with the Department of Education and Science to initiate a program of controlled expansion of selected university departments.

But — and this is essential — such a scheme must not be a

gravy-train for a privileged group of departments. The price for academics must be a complete willingness to welcome industrial participation in setting objectives for teaching and research, and to work as appropriate with industry to meet those objectives. The price for industry, if it wants 'better' graduates and 'more relevant' research, is to offer such participation. The price for government, if it wants success in information technology, is to fund a large number of new academic posts and to provide incentives for industry to collaborate.

May I be permitted one small side-swipe? It is astonishing to see how the BCS has fastidiously disdained any interest or initiative in this matter.

1982 — Information Technology Year — must be the time for urgent discussion and imaginative action, designed to yield tangible returns both rapidly and in the far future. A first step in collaboration between universities and industry would be to urge this case upon government. If anyone shares my views I should be pleased to hear from them.

Colin Tully, department of computer science, University of York, Heslington, York YO1 5DD.

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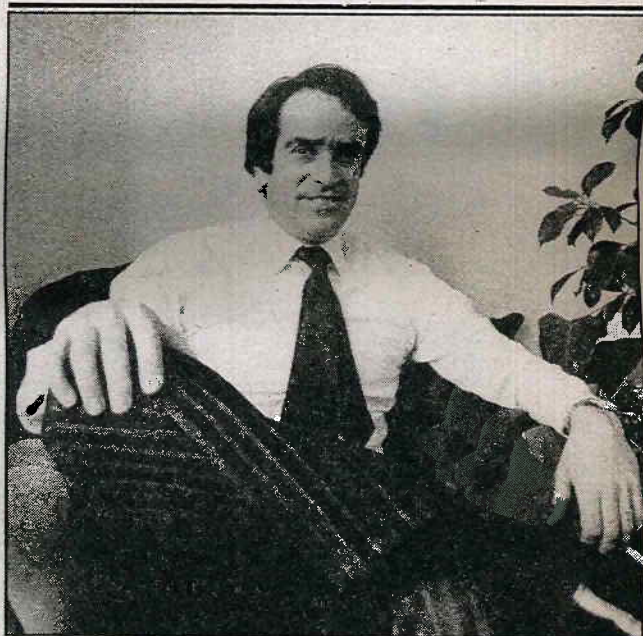
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Moty Arieli: concerned about United's leasing terminology

Leasing letter raises some fears

From Moty Arieli

I recently came across a two page letter under the signature of P Mitchell, United Leasing, addressed to a UK computer user.

I have reason to believe that a similar letter has been sent to other users, as that letter refers to a 'booklet' published a year ago on the subject of 'flexible' (sic) or 'indemnity' (sic) leasing, which as we all know, had quite a wide distribution.

Without addressing the 'holier than thou' attitude of United Leasing in general, I would like to comment on its terminology.

United distinguishes itself

from the 'indemnity' or 'flexible' leases under attack in that:

● United asserts that under United leases, 'the customer knows from day one the length of his commitment'. I hope Mitchell would agree with me that such knowledge is a subjective one, and unless the latter had been misled, the lessor acts properly as long as the lease documents clearly stipulate the trade-off between the early termination flexibility and the financeable period;

● United emphasises that its leases are not 'indemnity' or 'flexible' leases, but rather 'walk-away' leases. Is United aware that the term 'walk-away lease' (rather than flexible or indemnity lease) was the one used by OPM to describe its operating lease structure?

Moty Arieli, 41 South Eaton Place, Belgravia, London SW1.