BHCI 2020 Doctoral Consortium Chair's Foreword

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When British HCI 2020 was cancelled due to Covid-19, it was decided to still run the Doctoral Consortium as a virtual event. A year is a long time in a PhD, and 2020 has been a year where more support than ever was needed. This was a challenge for the DC Organising Committee as none of us had ever organised a virtual event of this sort before, although over the last year we have all learnt fast. However, this challenge unleashed creative solutions, many of which we expect to become patterns for future face-to-face events. Many people made this possible, the organising committee, keynote speakers, members of the HCI community and most of all the participants themselves.

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1. BACKGROUND

The British HCI conference (BHCI) is one of the oldest international conferences in human-computer interaction, running since 1985. For many of us in the UK and across the world, it has been the place where we first presented as a new researcher. The Doctoral Consortium (DC) has always been a special part of BHCI. Most conferences have a doctoral consortium, but the prominence and support within BHCI has always been unusually strong. It is a place where the next generation of researchers, academics, and practitioners are nurtured, challenged and welcomed.

The day after BHCI 2020 DC there was a workshop on the History of HCI (HHCI, 2020) – there is certainly a story to be told of the history of BHCI DC and the role it has played in the lives of so many prominent figures in the discipline. My own first paper in HCI was published at the very first BHCI conference (Dix and Runciman, 1985). In the early days HCI researchers were often either alone or in a very small group within their respective departments and universities and international travel was rare. The opportunity to meet and share was critical. Today, it is often those in smaller HCI groups who benefit most from the experience of the DC, both at BHCI and elsewhere.

2. COVID-19 IMPACT

Of course, this has not been a year like any other.

As the spread of Covid-19 became apparent, the BHCI 2020 Organising Committee together with the Interactions SIG of BCS chose early to cancel the conference and focus efforts on BHCI 2021. For academics and established researchers this would be a minor blip. There would be other venues, or simply wait a year to publish their results. However, for a PhD researcher a year is a long time.

For those at the beginning of their PhD journey a year without BHCI DC could mean missing early feedback to help formulate their entire research direction; for those mid-point lost encouragement and sharing with peers; for those towards the end no last opportunity to obtain critique from experienced researchers before they face their examiners across a table in their final defence.

Not only would this be a missed year for those doctoral researchers, but a particularly critical year. The Covid-19 lockdown disrupted the normal working patterns of every student, researcher and academic, the daily chat across the photocopier transformed into meetings over Zoom where someone always has a broken connection. For many HCI researchers it disrupted face-to-face access to users and made lab-based studies impossible.

3. OPPORTUNITIES AMONGST CRISIS

Covid-19 created new challenges to the discipline as the world transferred itself to digital communications at an unprecedented rate. If

asked in 2019, most of us would have spoken platitudes about digital transformation, but the crisis, especially widespread lockdowns, have shown how far we were from this picture, how fast change can happen, and how many are left behind. Those who have spent years talking about digital exclusion have seen the issue take centre stage, and we are all finding new issues that HCI research needs to address including medical applications, loneliness and social isolation, and communicating complex mathematical and computational models to politicians and the general public (Dix, 2020). Covid-19 has made us see the world with fresh eyes: an experiment writ large testing the resilience and fragility of human relationships and evaluating the strength and weakness of digital technology to help them.

At day one of a changed world, this was not a time to say "wait until next year".

4. VIRTUAL DC – MORE THAN FACE-TO-FACE

When we decided to go ahead with a virtual DC, none of us had experience with running remote or virtual workshops and conferences. Now, half a year on, that has certainly changed! However, from that first decision, we knew this could not be a 'good enough' event, an apology for a DC that is not happening 'properly', a second rate, second best opportunity. Although we would inevitably lose something of the dynamics of face-to-face interaction, we were determined that this should not be less, but different, and better in the ways that were made possible by a remote event.

It is fair to say that we had more ideas and more plans than we were able to deliver in the time available, both between the decision and the event and given the additional workload that most academics faced during the rapid shift to online delivery of teaching. We certainly have lots of things up our sleeves for next year's DC!

However, we have been able to use the virtual event to extend its reach both in terms of the number of people involved and the creation of resources for the future.

On numbers we were able to accept twice as many doctoral participants as we normally would do at a physical event, using a mix of plenary and breakout sessions during the 'day' of the DC. In addition, partly because of the increased number of participants, we also involved many more experienced academics giving short talks, acting as panellists during participant presentations, and taking part in group discussions.

On the resources side, we have invited the HCI community to contribute their 'top tips' for HCI and have recorded the keynote presentations of the day, which together with resource suggestions suggested by the participants, wider community

and the DC committee will become a living resource site, we hope for years to come (DC, 2020).

5. PEOPLE AT THE HEART

It is people that make a community.

So first a huge thanks to all those on the BHCI2020 DC Organising Committee: Raymond Bond, Tom Flint Lynne Hall, Goksel Misirli, Ed de Quincey, Gavin Robert Sim, and Sandra Woolley. They all gave both their time and their creative energy at a time when there were so many other demands and difficulties. The ideas and inspirations not only made this a very special event, but have also established new patterns for BHCI Doctoral Consortia in future years.

Of these a special thanks to Sandra both in her role as BHCI 2020 conference chair taking up many of the practical logistics of this event just when the conference itself had been postponed to a future year; however also as the driver of the production of these proceedings.

Thanks too to those who took part on the day: our keynotes speakers Chris Speed (2020) and Raymond Bond (2020a, 2020b), Tom Flint (2020) for his talk on narrative and the supporting panel of academics Russell Beale, Miriam Sturdee, William Wong. The latter, together with the keynotes and members of the organising committee allowed us to have breakout groups with sufficient experienced academics alongside the doctoral researchers for detailed feedback and discussion.

In addition many members of the wider HCI committee contributed to the resources on the web site.

Finally of course, the biggest thanks to the participants themselves, coming from different universities, countries, areas of HCI and each at different stages in their career path and research journey. Their energy and enthusiasm meant that this was not just a event that 'coped' through the difficulties, but one that was exciting, enjoyable and sets a mark for future DCs to live up to!

6. LEGACY

These Proceedings form a lasting legacy to the creative potential of a generation of HCI researchers. The papers are testament to the on-going vitality of the field, but it is the participants themselves are the true legacy of the event.

Do also visit the BHCI 2020 DC website. This has videos of keynotes, the 'top tips', suggested reading, and much more. It is being transformed into a permanent resource for the HCI community.

<https://hcibook.net/dc-bcshci2020/>

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DOCTORAL CONSORTIUM

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