

Foreword

Writing the introductions to the successive volumes of *Olympiads in Informatics* gives a moment to reflect. Typically on the changing face of informatics olympiads and education but also informatics and wider society in general. In the time between the previous (5th) conference and this one, back in October 2011, one of the pioneer computer scientists passed away. This was someone whose work had a noticeable influence on most informatics olympiads, indeed on much of computing as we know it today, and someone whose death whilst making the obituary columns in many major papers rarely made it any further. Quickly forgotten, or passing under most peoples' radar, a man without whom the current IT landscape would look somewhat different.

We refer, of course, to *Dennis Ritchie* whose contributions included such things as the UNIX operating system and the C language. It is perhaps telling that almost all informatics olympiads – excluding perhaps those aimed at a relatively junior level – include C or its successors as programming options. On receiving the US National Medal of Technology he, along with his co-recipient, said “*We take this award to us as symbolic of the seminal contributions of our immediate colleagues . . . many of the most interesting ideas were not ours, but generated in collaboration*”.

It would be easy to focus on the “*collaboration*” statement. We are, after all, a conference so our very existence relies on collaboration within our community. Individuals to write the papers, review them, edit them and of course read and use them, without which they are but “*sound and fury, signifying nothing*”. Rather, let us reflect on the “*seminal contributions*”. Our field is a relatively young one, one which leaving aside its mathematic roots (claiming the 300 BCE Euclidean algorithm as evidence for computer science existing for over 2 millennium would be stretching a point) and some programable machines in the 1800s, really kicked off in the 1930s. Some of the early pioneers are still amongst us and many of us have worked with and known others.

Our up-and-coming computer scientists have that opportunity to be pioneers in the field. Our informatics olympiads are a means for capturing and enthusing potential students; to quote the IOI regulations “*To bring the discipline of informatics to the attention of young people*”. We all have different requirements when putting together our olympiads. We want to attract a wide range of students, introduce real computing to students who otherwise only see the end results; the games they play and the word processing they are 'taught' in schools. We are also there though for our best students – our participation at global olympiads proves that point. How do we encourage those students? Our best students are often the best students in a multitude of subjects – why should they choose informatics? How do we grab our new pioneers?

Informatics in general is young and the teaching of informatics, plus teaching with informatics, younger still. We have opportunities, in many of our countries, to have an impact – positive or negative – on the way students are taught. Get it right and paradigms for future teaching will be set; a pioneering footstep. Get it wrong and we will just a part of a passing trend; an inevitable footnote.

This volume is quite extensive: we are publishing 22 papers and reports. The format for the journal follows three tracks: the primary section of the journal focuses on research (the acceptance rate is around 40%); the second report section is devoted to sharing our national experiences – potentially of less interest to those outside the community; the last section presents some book reviews which we hope will be of interest to our readers. We are pleased that this volume succeeded in getting national reports from various countries. Again, we would like to encourage writing short comments, opinions and challenges – it will be useful for everybody within community.

As always thanks are due to all those who have assisted with the current volume – authors, reviewers and editors. A lot of work goes, not only to the writing of the papers, but to an extended period of review and correction and, in several cases, translation. Peer reviewing all of the papers takes a significant amount of time and work and special thanks should be given to those otherwise unsung reviewing heroes: Ian W. Atha, Jonas Blonskis, Ben Burton, Giorgio Casadei, Sebastien Combefis, Hugo Duenas, Gerald Futschek, Gintautas Grigas, Sari Haj Hussein, Ville Leppänen, Krassimir Manev, Timo Poranen, Rhein Prank, Jūratė Skūpienė, Peter Taylor, Ahto Truu, Troy Vasiga, Willem van der Vegt, and Peter Walker.

Last, but by no means least, particular thanks are due to the organisational committee for IOI'2012 in Italy without whose assistance we would be unable to hold the conference. Their assistance, during what is an already busy period, is gratefully received.

Editors