HCSNet, the ARC Research Network in Human Communication Science

HCSNet received the initial funding for its five-year program in late 2004. This report summarises progress during the first year of funding.

An inaugural Steering Committee meeting, with representation from all 14 institutions who were party to the original proposal, was held at Macquarie University on 6th December 2004. At that meeting, a range of potential activities and programs were discussed, and the remits of a number of task groups were defined as a means to ensuring broad participation in the forward planning of the Network.

On 27th January 2005, a one-day HCSNet Launch Meeting was held at the University of Western Sydney, with approximately 100 attendees from the institutions participating in the Network. Comprising a number of participatory plenary and breakout sessions, this workshop focussed on identifying actual and potential interactions between the wide range of disciplines that fall within the scope of the network, and on getting the Network participants involved in the task group structure we had set up to plan network activities. Over the next three months, task groups focussed on developing ideas in the areas of: External Liaison; Publications; Data; Student Programs; Curriculum and Summer Schools; and Events. The HCSNet website was set up, and a weekly electronic newsletter initiated. Some activities requiring expenditure were put on hold while contractual issues regarding some of the participating institutions were resolved.

Our first round of funding for interdisciplinary workshops was announced in May, with two workshops being funded: a workshop on Multimodal Interaction, held at the Australian Technology Park in Sydney in September 2005; and a workshop on ‘Conceptualising Communication’, to be held in Armidale in early December 2005. In our second round, three workshops were funded: a Workshop for Interactive Systems in the Performing Arts (WISP), a workshop on Speech Recognition and Auditory Perception under Adverse Conditions (SPAPAC), and a workshop on the Computational Modelling of Language and Communication Disorders. The first two are key pillars of our inaugural annual conference, to be held at Macquarie University in 13-16 December; the third workshop will take place in Sydney in the first half of 2006. In addition, as an elaboration of the work of the Data Task group, a one-day workshop was held at Macquarie University on 21st October to develop plans for supporting data collation and sharing.

Our major activity for the year is HCSNet SummerFest, to be held at Macquarie University in December 2005. This comprises a two-day summer school, which includes 16 separate summer school presentations in introductory and advanced aspects of Human Communication Science, a student poster session, and a three day conference incorporating a novel ‘speed papers’ session, the aforementioned WISP and SPAPAC workshops, and an existing conference of some 30 years longevity, the Australian Language and Speech Conference. Some 230+ attendees are registered for SummerFest, including 120 students from across Australia who are attending the summer school. HCSNet sees student activities, and the encouragement of student interactions, as being central to the success of our goal of encouraging interdisciplinary thinking; we are particularly pleased, therefore, that over 120 students from our participating institutions will be attending the summer school with more than 70 presenting posters on their work to their peers.

All in all, the Network’s first year has been an active and encouraging one. We are actively planning further mechanisms to break down interdisciplinary barriers, and to take advantage of the wealth of knowledge and experience represented by our now 450+ Network participants.