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The Editor

THES

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Dear Sir,

I was somewhat surprised to see Dr. McBride's article (9 Feb. 2007, p. 14). Yes, we do teach algorithms, *some* of which have "remained unchanged for thirty years". Would Dr. McBride like to be treated by a doctor who had not been taught the circulation of the blood because it was invented 300 years ago? I simply do not recognise "a PhD is not a gateway to industry": one of my PhDs is Chief Technology Officer of one of Britain's oldest software houses (one of whose major products is add-ins to Excel), and two of our staff (one very senior, both with PhDs) are on secondment to industry: one with the explicit aim 'the improvement of teaching by bringing relevant skills back from industry to influence taught courses'.

Dr. McBride says "companies do not hire armies of programmers". This is true, but misleading, since armies of programmers *are* hired, in more, smaller, lots. Cambridge computer science (in many respects the oldest of the "old men") charges companies (about as many in number as there are graduating students) for the privilege of recruiting there: enough to fund two research studentships.

The phrase "their research base is weak" is at odds with EPSRC's recent International Review Panel on ICT. If it is weak, can Dr. McBride explain why an American software house pays for one of our professors (PhD!) to fly to India to contribute algorithms to their software development of globalised (yes, we do know the word) products? At the EPSRC meeting, a speaker (with a PhD!) from Microsoft said almost the opposite to this article, both in terms of research and in terms of "relevance to industry".

This is not to say that there are no good points in the article. "The environment within which computing exists has changed", and we all acknowledge that. Not all those who use secure websites know that their security rests on the Diffie–Hellman encryption algorithm. It is perhaps telling that security, one of UK computer science's strengths, does not feature in Dr. McBride's list of "skills in IT departments". This probably *does* tell us something about our failure to "engage with society", and I look forward to demonstrating Diffie–Hellman

encryption at the forthcoming 'Bath TAPS into Science' fair.

Yours faithfully,

James Davenport

all "quotes" from McBride

'PhD' is short for 'Ph.D. in Computer Science'