

## **Peter's story**

### **1. The invitation**

Just before the end of the first term of my final year as an undergraduate in the Department of Communication and Computer Engineering, my Head of Department (Professor Brian Healey) called me to see him. He suggested that I should consider staying on for a PhD, as my final year project was of great interest to both the Department and his own company.

**Q1 Comment on Professor Healey's suggestion**

**Q2 How should Peter respond?**

## **2. The improved offer**

Although I was flattered, I wanted to get a job, as the market was desperate for engineers with experience. So I said I would think about it.

But midway through the second term I was approached again by Prof. Healey. This time funding was mentioned. The offer was an EPSRC Case (collaborative) award, with Prof. Healey's company, Healey Communications plc, as the industrial sponsor.

Meanwhile a company in Reading had just given me a very good job offer. When I informed Prof. Healey of this, he seemed rather put out. Probably as a result of our conversation, later that week one of Prof. Healey's employees contacted me with the intention of convincing me to stay. I was still not convinced, as I really liked the job offer.

A few days later I was contacted again with a request to see Prof. Healey. We had another meeting and he offered me a large increase in funding: £7000 p.a. provided by the Company.

**Q1 Comment on Professor Healey's offer, and on the academic and financial arrangements implied.**

**Q2 What should Peter do now?**

### **3. The choice of a PhD topic**

After a long discussion we finally agreed on a sum of money (£8000) with an assurance of a minimum commitment to the Company.

I accepted the offer. I thought that it would be a good decision, as I would be paid while I studied and I would not be committed to work for them afterwards. It was agreed that Simon Elliot (a new lecturer) would be my first supervisor and Prof. Healey my second.

After graduation (with a 2:1 Hons.) I took one month's holiday. Then in August I arrived to start on my PhD and joined the 25 other research students and assistants working in the Department partly or wholly funded by many of the major companies in the computer industry.

I settled into the office and continued to read around the general area of my final year project - the area decided for my PhD. After about a month I was trying to understand why a well-published architecture was seen as the ideal solution to the next generation of communications technology. And I soon realised that I was on to something.

I began to analyse the suggested ideal solution to the problem. At this stage I had not been given any supervisor guidance. I discovered that the suggested solution was not only pushing the technology to its limits, but its large phyot 41



## **5. Rejection**

Leading up to the end of my first year I wrote and presented another conference paper on the potential of my suggested new architecture. This prompted another meeting on the subject with Healey Communications. This time Prof. Healey brought the other Company Director in to discuss the situation.

I provided a report including an outline of the resources I needed to start development on my idea. But the investment was seen by them to be too expensive for Healey Communications as it is only a small consultancy firm. So once again the idea was thrown out.

Soon after that Simon gave me another area to research - which proved to be as unfruitful as the previous work given to me by Prof. Healey. Meanwhile I have written and submitted a third paper on my own idea and submitted it to a professional journal for publication. This paper provides further evidence that not only is my idea efficient in respect to physical size and power consumption, but also the technology is already available to produce it.

Since then I have proved that the new area given to me by Simon has a detrimental effect on the overall system's performance.

**Q1 Refer to your Postgraduate Handbook(s), Guidelines etc. What rules can you find to cover this kind of situation?**

**Q2 What course of action would you recommend to Peter?**

## **6. The end of the line?**

I am now four months into my second year and there has been no change in attitude. I have suddenly been asked to meet with the Company to discuss how I can provide some value to the Company! If providing them with the idea and know-how to produce the first efficient and practical solution to a

**Team task**

**On the acetates provided list the main lessons here for**

- a) New postgraduate students**
- b) Supervisors of sponsored PhD students**
- c) Universities with a policy of developing a closer relationship with industry**
- d) Companies considering working with universities**
- e) Research Councils fostering the development of those relationships**