

Student's summer software success gets Big Blue buzzing

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A computer program created by a University of Manchester student during his summer holidays is being developed further by industry giant IBM.

Robert Craig, a final year Computer Science student, played a key role in developing a piece of business software called ESP.

The policy management tool is designed to process so-called 'computer readable' data, taken from important policy documents agreed between a company and a client.

Robert and his team developed a Web application that allows this computer-readable information to be interpreted and presented in a 'human-readable' format.

Robert, who is 21 and originally from Macclesfield, was one of just sixteen students selected from universities across the UK to participate in IBM's 2006 Extreme Blue programme, which is designed to foster innovation.

Extreme Blue challenges groups of students to develop the technology and a business plan for a new product or service that addresses an existing market challenge.

There were four teams of undergraduates involved in the UK programme, consisting of both business and technical members. The

teams were supported by IBM technical and business mentors.

The UK scheme was based at IBM Hursley Park near Winchester, but schemes also ran in Ireland, France, Germany and Holland. All of the teams then came together at a special expo at IBM in La Gaude, France.

The teams met each other and had the opportunity to present and demonstrate their projects to senior IBM executives and technical employees from around Europe.

IBM, which is also known as Big Blue, says that following the expo in France earlier this year, ESP is now being investigated and developed further.

"Extreme Blue was an amazing experience," said Robert. "The programme was only three months long, which meant everything was quite intense.

"It is unique, as you are involved in the whole software development process from requirement gathering, through to developing, through to testing.

"Over the summer I learnt a vast amount in many areas, not just technical skills. My public speaking skills have really developed due to the presentations we had to give at the expo in France and the conference calls with people from all over the globe.

"I find the fact that our work is going to be continued extremely exciting, as I know how much the final product will help a vast number of people."

Robert says that once his Web application has been integrated with some other tools, it should be able to scan the computer-readable data and

check for policy compliance on all the computers within a customer's business.

When it finds instances of non-compliance, it will automatically flag this up to the relevant people.

Source: University of Manchester

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