Organising a World Conference

by Sandra Wills
WCCE 90 International Programme Chairman

IFIP World Conferences on Computers in Education, held only once every five years, provide an opportunity for computer educators around the world to share their ideas and their experiences, their achievements and their frustrations in this rapidly developing field. The fifth World Conference will be held in Sydney, Australia in July 1990. It has been five years of planning and organisation. We hope that the decision to hold the conference in the southern hemisphere will increase the opportunity for participation by computer educators in developing nations. This concern is reflected in many of the papers and presentations at the conference.

There will be approximately 190 papers and more than 350 presentations given. The papers will be published in the Conference Proceedings. Other presentations will be reviewed in an Abstracts Proceedings published by the Australian Council for Computers in Education. These combined volumes will provide a permanent record of what happens at WCCE 90.

Papers have been selected from the total number of presentations in order to offer a broad cross-section of countries, authors, and topics. All accepted presentations were sent to three independent reviewers. The reviewers, are a vital component of an IFIP world conference. They ensure fair and unbiased treatment of the proposals that we receive. Their contribution is greatly appreciated.

We received over six hundred proposals for papers, presentations, panels, workshops, and meetings, from forty-one countries. In addition, more than fifty proposals arrived during the months following the closing date in October 1989 and were too late to be reviewed for inclusion in the programme. I would like to thank the people, over two-hundred of them, who took the trouble to prepare submissions to WCCE 90 but who could not be accepted for presentation. Their efforts, although unrecognised, are nevertheless an important part of the success of a refereed conference. I'm sure they will not be deterred from attending the conference nor from submitting again to the sixth WCCE in 1995.

The overwhelming response to the call for papers indicates the continuing growth and maturing of the computer education community. In order to highlight the diversity and richness of computer education, I structured the fifth World Conference as an umbrella conference. Each sector of computer education has been allocated its own stream or mini-conference under the guidance of its own chairman.

The streams include elementary, secondary, university, vocational education and training, research, and rainbow. "Rainbow" is a term we coined to describe presentations that cut across these streams, for example presentations on national computer education policies. This stream is like a rainbow because it encompasses all the "colours" of the computer education spectrum. The mini-conferences will include CBT 90, PEG 90, and Tele teaching 90 which respectively address the use of computer based training in industry, new tools in the classroom, and computing in distance education.

In addition, mini-conferences will be held before and after WCCE 90 in Auckland, New Zealand; Cairns, Australia and Tokyo, Japan. All of these mini-conferences will produce separate proceedings or publications, however, some key papers from the New Zealand conference are included in the WCCE 90 Conference Proceedings.

I am grateful to the stream and mini-conference chairmen, who have worked with me to develop the WCCE 90 programme. All have worked towards the goal of producing an internationally representative programme. WCCE 90 is not just another conference open to attendance by delegates from around the world: it has been organised by a world committee. International Programme Committee meetings were held at least once a year, sometimes twice, in different parts of the world over the last five years. Twenty to thirty countries were officially represented at these meetings and the costs were borne by each country, many times from the representatives' own pockets. Countries' representatives who were not present at the meetings still had a major role to play in disseminating information within their countries.

It has been hard work for all of us, and all of us have been volunteer organisers over and above our day-to-day paid jobs. Education is one industry that runs non-commercial low budget conferences. WCCE 90 would not have been financially viable without the considerable time and energy provided voluntarily by the members of the international and Australian committees. About eighty people were directly involved in the committees, and these people drew on the resources of their employers and other colleagues to get the job done.

The conference would not have been financially viable without the mone tary support of our sponsors, especially the major sponsors: Microsoft, Commodore, Apple, and IBM. Their contributions, along with that of the Australian Computer Society, the host organisation for the conference, cover the high costs of printing and international communication in the years leading up to the conference. We thank all the sponsors for their support of computer education.

For me it has been an interesting challenge to create and build a large multinational event. It has also been an opportunity to forge friendships with colleagues in other countries, to discuss our common problems, and to learn from our differences. I hope readers use the international network that we have built, to add to their experience and knowledge of computer education. I look forward to the next five years of our industry's growth and development.