

## Fortran Specialist Group Chair's Report 2019/20

This is my first year as chair and I would like to thank the group for having confidence in me to take the helm. I would also like to especially thank my two immediate predecessors, Peter Crouch and John Reid, who have kept the group active and enthused, and who still continue to serve the committee in various roles as they have done for many, many years.

Our year started off as usual with the AGM followed by the half-day meeting held jointly with the Computational Physics Group of the Institute of Physics. Unfortunately, the attendance was substantially down on the previous year with only approximately 15 persons – this is partially attributed to shifting the date and problems with circulating the notices to the IoP members. We are conscious that drifting further into start-of-term can impact upon attendance from the academic community.

In the chair's report of last year, John Reid remarked that no year is like any other and so 2019/20 went to great lengths to demonstrate with the CoViD-19 outbreak. This has impacted all our lives from immediate concerns about the health of our nearest and dearest through to people being furloughed and facing threat of unemployment. In the world of IT, and high-performance computing in particular, we have been fortunate to be in great demand but there has been commensurate pressure on us as science and engineering activities move to remote working / cloud platforms in very short order and a vast number of new pandemic related research has been initiated that needs to be supported.

I have never been as busy for such a prolonged and sustained period in my IT career and this sentiment seems to be very common. In part reflection of this, the BCS ran its [#viiTalworker campaign](#) in April highlighting “the essential role that IT professionals are playing in connecting people personally and professionally, during the CoViD-19 crisis”.

There has been relatively minor fall-out in Fortran circles as the well-established physical meetings were cancelled (e.g. [JTC1/SC22/WG5](#) now next meets in Manchester in June 2021). However, the virtualization of meetings has had a positive effect as no longer are we constrained by the time and expense of international travel. I suspect that [FortranCon 2020](#) – which was the first international conference dedicated to the Fortran language – enjoyed much of the success that it did due to going online. This is likely to become the new normal and it seems probable that solely physical events will become rarer and less acceptable.

This year is the 50<sup>th</sup> year of the Fortran Specialist Group. This is a significant milestone to make for any group and is a testament to the continued relevance and impact of the language, let alone the group itself. We have been conscious however that the pre-eminence of Fortran is not what it was when the group started and as such it is difficult to reach a new audience and retain members. To address this, a proposal was made to BCS HQ to change the remit of the group and this was approved. Over the next year we will slowly transform into the **Scientific & Engineering Computing SG**, but we will not forget our roots and the group will continue to act as a focal point for Fortran development and standardization activity. I'm not likely to be around in 50 years to see how this goes but it would be good to think that we might pull-in some younger members that might!

John Pelan – London, 23<sup>rd</sup> September 2020