Favourable Feedback from the EPSRC

As you know, the SPMC Network was funded by the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council (EPSRC) for the first three years of its life. Last year (2004) the SPMC organisers had to submit a full report to the EPSRC so that the funding body could assess how good a job had been carried out. The Assessment came back in September, and was very favourable indeed. Here are the final assessments, plus some useful and interesting comments from the assessors. If anyone would like to see the full external report or self evaluation, please let Ray Ison know (r.l.ison@open.ac.uk).

Final assessments

There are seven criteria for assessment, made on a five-point scale ranging from Unsatisfactory to Internationally leading or Outstanding. They define the assessment criteria still further by using the terminology of 'Tending to…'which crops up in several of our assessments, including the overall one, which was Tending to Outstanding. In detail, the results were:

Research quality	Tending to internationally leading
Research planning and practice	Tending to internationally leading
Potential scientific impact	Tending to internationally leading
Output of research staff	Good
Communication of research outputs	Good
Potential benefits to society	Tending to outstanding
Cost effectiveness	Outstanding

From the assessors' comments

Research quality

'The 'project set out to achieve challenging objectives in a relatively short timescale, given the complexity of the issues it was trying to achieve significant progress has been made to create new insights, by bringing together leading academics and expert practitioners from a wide range of relevant disciplines. The research process was novel and provided opportunities for many academics and practitioners to share and synthesize knowledge. The process itself should be considered as an output of the research and **hopefully the network can be sustained and developed further**.'

Research planning and practice

'From personal experience, each event was well-organised to provide a combination of stimulating theoretical discourse and practical application of emergent ideas to practical problems and issues. **This has created a new level of dialogue between academics and practitioners.'**

Potential scientific impact

'The key attributes are the development of an approach that may better reconcile the alternative perspectives of systems as social phenomena or products of a design process and to demonstrate that systems development needs to be considered as an orchestration of network interactions among diverse stakeholders, rather than a managed process. The ability to combine different knowledge sets is essential to address the increasing complexity of systems.'

Output of research staff

'**The outputs so far have been of high quality in terms of both academic standard and practitioner relevance**…Additionally, the new thinking has been included in education programmes to improve the knowledge and skills of IS practitioners.'

Communication of research outputs

'…I would like to see further publications in a wide range of journals.'

Potential benefits to society

'This is difficult to assess, since adoption of new ideas and methods from research into wide-scale practice has been traditionally very slow. However, **the project has been very successful in combining academic and practitioner knowledge in the research process, which should result, in time, in research being able to inform practice more effectively**.'

Cost effectiveness

'This was excellent value for money. A modest grant has enabled an extensive network of interested parties to work together under the guidance of leading academics and practitioners. This created a new type of collaboration among the groups involved.'