2. BCS — The Chartered Institute for IT

2.1 Aims and policies

'The BCS — The Chartered Institute for IT' – or simply the BCS – is a large professional organisation with about 73,000 members. [1] Its history dates from 1956/7 with the merger of the London Computer Group and an unincorporated association of scientists to become the British Computer Society Ltd.

Statement of purpose and values

The BCS summarises its main goals on its website as follows. [2]

> *"At BCS, we're ensuring the digital journey is safe and positive for everyone, by raising standards of competence and conduct across the IT industry and tackling the ethical challenges we face along the way."*

The BCS has five 'strategic pillars' through which it pursues its main goals. It interprets these as follows. [2]

> *"Supporting careers*
> *We're creating a diverse and sustainable IT profession with opportunities for development and progression at every step."*
>
> *"Sharing expertise*
> *We offer an inclusive environment; a space where you can communicate and collaborate, with like and unlike-minds, to kickstart innovation."*
>
> *"Improving education*
> *We're equipping society with the knowledge, skills and understanding to remain resilient and thrive in the digital world."*
>
> *"Influencing practice*
> *We tackle the big issues in IT, connecting industry, education and government to shape policy and bring about ethical change."*
>
> *"Driving standards*
> *We bring out the best in people, recognising talent at every level through our professional registration, qualifications and frameworks."*

Environmental policy

We found a lack of clarity around BCS policies on the environment. In 2013 the institute published an environmental policy, which was then republished in 2014. Its 'position' [3] was as follows:

> *"BCS believes that considerable scope exists within the IT industry to improve energy efficiency and reduce CO2 emissions. It should be noted that even if CO2 emissions are proved not to be the culprit [of climate change], doing this makes good economic sense anyway. It is important that sustainable IT practices are adopted by both individuals and businesses (on a voluntary basis) when their own reductions can help contribute to national emission targets. With the current national focus on environmental sustainability set to continue increased visibility of corporate social responsibility will enhance reputations. These programmes need not be economically draining and the smallest changes can be beneficial. Also to be encouraged is staff awareness and training to help identification of personal behaviour and processes that reduce energy consumption. BCS is also concerned to make sure that technology developments are encouraged and supported to facilitate development of the energy and infrastructure planning and control systems and climate modelling and forecasting systems that are needed, not just to increase energy efficiency, but help climate scientists and policy makers improve their knowledge and decisions."*

It was encouraging that the BCS had published an environmental policy, especially when many of its contemporaries had not. However, we have three concerns related to it. The first is that the policy seems to question the some of the basic science behind climate change, the second is that the policy contains no specific targets for BCS members or the institute itself, and the third is that the current status of the policy is unclear.

In regard of the first concern, it is perplexing that the policy questioned whether CO_2 emissions are "the culprit" of climate change. Indeed, in the background section of this policy statement, it went further, saying that "there is still debate in the scientific community whether climate change is due mainly to global warming, caused primarily by CO_2 emissions, or whether other factors such as solar radiation and perturbations in the earth's orbit have greater influence". This questioned the overwhelming view of climate scientists that human emissions of CO_2 are the main cause, as exemplified by the 'assessment' reports of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change – the UN's main scientific advisory body in this area – since the mid-1990s. [4] The climate scientists' view has also been backed by numerous other professional scientific organisations in the UK and internationally. [5]

Perhaps these concerns were connected to the removal of that the statement from the BCS website in 2018. However, at the time of writing, no statement or policy had replaced it.

Despite these problems, there are a few environmental initiatives running within the BCS, although they do seem to be limited in scope. For example, there is a Green IT Specialist Group [6] – which links together professionals working in this area – and advice on "greening you IT workspace". [7]

2.2 Investments

Size and location of funds

The BCS did not hold any listed investments – such as equities or bonds – according to a recent annual report. We found that, instead, it held significant financial assets – of approximately £10m – in a bank deposit account. [1] In its most recent annual report at the time of writing, we found that it owned interests in several education companies. [8] We concluded, therefore, that it did not hold any investments in the arms or fossil fuel industries.

General investment policy

The investment policy of the BCS, as stated in a recent annual report, [1] was as follows.

> *"The Institute has continued the policy of recent years to hold surplus cash as bank deposits and has not invested in higher risk equity investments… Accordingly, the Institute is not exposed to any equity investment risk. The Institute reviews the continuance of this policy as part of its routine business processes."*

Ethical investment policy

From the BCS accounts and other publicly available documents, we have found no evidence that the BCS has an ethical investment policy. The organisation did not respond to our inquiry about whether it has such a policy. However, given that the institute does not hold listed investments, the importance of such a policy is reduced.

2.3 School education programmes

The BCS has an extensive education programme though the BCS Academy of Computing. [9] A significant part of this is the 'Computing at School' programme, which provides a wide variety of resources for teachers at primary and secondary schools. It is "supported and endorsed by" BT, Google, Microsoft, and RaspberryPi. [10] Another main programme is Barefoot Computing, which was originally funded by the Department for Education but is "now funded and run by BT in partnership with Computing at School." [11] None of the sponsors were classified as part of the arms or fossil fuel industries.

2.4 Events and sponsorship

The BCS organises numerous events, some of which are sponsored by corporations and other organisations. We carried out two short surveys of the sponsors of the institute's most prestigious events in mid-2017 and mid-2019. These are summarised in Table 2.1. None of the sponsors were classified as part of the arms or fossil fuel industries.

Event	Involvement type	Sponsor
Roger Needham Lecture (annual) [12]	Sponsor	Microsoft Research
Karen Spärck Jones Lecture (annual) [13]	Sponsor	IBM
UK IT Industry Awards (2017) [14]	Atrium Sponsor	BT[a]
	Category Sponsors	Egress, Indigo Blue, Nationwide, National Grid, North Highland, Reed Technology, RIT Tech
	Drinks Reception/ Tweetwall Sponsor	Nationwide
	Headline/ VIP Drinks Reception Sponsor	Accenture
Cyber Crime (2019) [15]	Sponsors	North West Regional Organised Crime Unit, UK Fast, IBM X-Force Iris, Secarma

Table 2.1 – Sponsors of BCS prestige events, mid-2017 and mid-2019

2.5 Corporate membership

The BCS runs a corporate membership – or 'organisational membership' – scheme. [16] However, we found limited details listed online, and no publicly accessible directory of organisational members.

2.6 Other corporate links

The BCS has one main magazine, ITNOW, which takes advertising from businesses and others. It is published quarterly and has a circulation of 70,000. [17] Our survey of the 2016 issues of the magazine indicated that the number of advertisements published was minimal and therefore this type of corporate link was not significant for this study. [18]

2.7 Overall assessment

Reviewing the information in this case study, we have given the BCS — The Chartered Institute for IT the assessment as shown in tables 2.2a and b.

	Investments	School education programmes	Events	Other
Involvement with arms corporations	None	None	None	None
Involvement with fossil fuel corporations	None	None	None	None

Table 2.2a – Corporate involvement ratings for the BCS — The Chartered Institute for IT

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[a] Several IT firms such as BT have large number of military contracts which, while large, are a very small proportion of the company's revenue or profits. For example, BT had contracts with the MoD worth £356m [19] in 2015/16 which amounted to 2% of their total revenue for the same year. [20]

	Ethical issues covered in this study
Positives	• No evidence of direct involvement with fossil fuel or arms corporations • No listed investments held • Some environmental initiatives
Negatives	• Lack of openness about corporate members • Lack of clarity about environmental policy

Table 2.2b – Positives and negatives for the BCS — The Chartered Institute for IT

In terms of transparency, the BCS publicly published information about many of its financial links to industry and other external organisations. However, it did not list its organisational or corporate members.

The institute's general financial policies led to it not holding any investments in the fossil fuel or arms industries. It is a shame, however, that this situation did not seem to be motivated by ethical concerns about these industries.

In the past the BCS has published an environmental policy statement, and has a few environmental initiatives related to the profession. However, the current status of its environmental policy is unclear.

We found no evidence of direct financial links between the BCS and the arms industry. However, the lack of publicly available data on the institute's corporate members is a concern here. Since the IT industry in general has significant links to military organisations – as indicated by the large contracts that some in the sector have (see, for example, footnote 'a') – we consider it likely that a significant number of arms companies could be corporate members. Only more openness about these financial links would provide certainty about the issue.

We found no evidence of direct financial links between the BCS and the fossil fuel industry. We have no reason to believe that if the data gaps mentioned above are filled, they would reveal significant links.

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