The Conference Coordinator Information System (CCIS)

An academic conference is an opportunity for researchers in a particular field to gather together for a few days to share and discuss the latest research in their area. At a conference a number of papers are presented by their authors to an audience of other researchers. The papers are written especially for the conference and must go through a peer-review process before they are accepted. Conferences typically include other activities such as workshops, panel discussions, invited speakers and social activities, but the main part is always the paper presentations, which occur in a number of sessions, each devoted to a particular track (topic) within the main conference theme. An example of an IT conference in Australia is ACIS (https://www.acis2017.org/; https://business.uow.edu.au/acis-2016/index.html)

The inaugural Australasian Conference on Green IT needs an information system that will (among other things) enable prospective attendees and presenters to submit papers for review, manage the reviewing process, and finally create the conference schedule and published proceedings based on the accepted papers. You have already interviewed the conference chair, Professor Westcott G. Charles, and have discovered the following requirements for the new system (the Conference Coordinator Information System, or CCIS).

Westcott G. Charles is the chair of the conference, but there are many others who contribute to the conference's success. There is an editor, who has final responsibility for decisions on paper acceptance, ably assisted in this process by an extensive review committee. The committee consists of a number of other researchers from various institutions around the world. These are the people responsible for reviewing the submitted papers and recommending their acceptance or rejection. The CCIS is required to keep track of the reviewers: their names, titles, institutions and emails must be recorded, along with their preferred areas for paper reviewing. Each reviewer nominates three tracks that they are prepared to review papers in from a list of all the tracks that may be covered at the conference.

Authors submit their papers to the CCIS through a web interface. The authors complete an online form with their details and upload the paper electronically. All author details (name, title, institution, email) must be included for all authors. One of the authors is also designated as 'corresponding author' to whom any emails about the reviewing process will be sent. The paper title and abstract is also included in the form. To ensure a paper is reviewed by experts in the same field, it must include a list of keywords that the editor will use to assign the paper to suitable reviewers.

The paper itself is uploaded to the CCIS via the submission form as a PDF attachment. Papers must conform to particular criteria: they must be under a maximum number of pages; be formatted according to the conference template; and must be anonymised (all information that could identify the authors is removed). If a submitted paper doesn't meet all these criteria, it is rejected without being reviewed. If it is submitted after the closing date it is also rejected immediately. Each paper is assigned a system-generated number to ensure it remains anonymous throughout the reviewing process.

Each paper is reviewed by two reviewers. The reviewers are sent the paper and asked to assess it against a number of criteria, using an online form. Reviewers are given three weeks to assess a paper and are reminded by a system-generated email if they have not returned their reviews in that time. Each reviewer is asked to review a maximum of four papers.

When all the reviews for a paper have been received, the editor assesses them and assigns the paper to a category: accepted, accepted subject to revisions, and rejected. The corresponding author is notified of the fate of their submission via a system-generated email. This email contains the reviewer comments and a standard message advising the authors of the outcome.

If a paper is accepted, its authors must then upload a complete, camera-ready PDF version of it to the CCIS. If it has been accepted subject to revisions, they must resubmit the paper in camera-ready form, with the revisions made.

Once all of the accepted papers have been received, the editor works out the schedule for the conference, by assigning each paper to a particular track, date, time, and venue. This is done manually and entered into the CCIS. If changes are subsequently made (e.g. if an author withdraws their paper from the conference) the schedule is updated. Two days before the conference the final schedule is printed and included in the conference materials collected by the attendees when they arrive. The only information about a paper included in the conference schedule is its title and authors, but there is more detail in the 'Summary of papers' which is also included in the conference materials. The summary of papers lists the title and abstract for each of the conference papers, along with its authors, in alphabetical order of first author. Finally, there is a list of all authors and their institutions, in alphabetical order of author.

The conference workshops are opportunities for conference attendees to learn more on a particular topic or technique. Workshops generally run for 2-3 hours and have a maximum enrolment number. When the 'Call for Papers' for the conference goes out there is also a 'Call for Workshops' and potential workshop presenters respond with an abstract of their proposed session. A selection of suitable workshops is chosen directly by the conference chair and the presenters are notified.

Other conference activities are more ad-hoc. There are to be two guest speakers, who will each present an extended talk on a general theme relating to the conference. Panel sessions on particular topics involve volunteers from among the conference attendees participating in a Q&A session.

The workshops, guest presentations and panel sessions are included in the conference schedule, but are not published in the conference Proceedings. The Proceedings is produced immediately after the conference and contains all of the presented papers from the camera-ready versions supplied by the authors.