

GSLT International Advisory Group

Report 2003

Executive Summary

The Swedish Graduate School of Language Technology (GSLT) is an unusual federation of an excellent group of smaller laboratories involved in graduate education in language technology. It has attracted good students and modest industrial interest, and is offering added value through the cooperation of its participating institutes. Graduate students and graduate faculty are clearly benefiting from this cooperation, which promotes a young scientific area which is likely to play an important facilitating role in ensuring that language technology products are available for the Swedish language. The international advisory board is unanimous in its recommendation that the GSLT seek mechanisms which will allow it to continue functioning at its present, most promising level.

Introduction

GSLT's international advisory group met on 12th March 2003 at Göteborg University. Present were the members of the advisory group: Dr Lori Lamel, LIMSI-CNRS, Paris, Professor John Nerbonne, Groningen and Professor Stephen Pulman, Oxford and representatives from GSLT: Professor Lars Ahrenberg, Linköping, Professor Robin Cooper, Göteborg, Leif Grönqvist (doctoral student, Växjö), Pontus Johansson (doctoral student, Linköping), and Professor Joakim Nivre, Växjö. This document is the advisory group's report resulting from discussion at the meeting.

This report was prepared under the editorial responsibility of the advisory board with assistance from GSLT. The March 12 meeting involved a presentation by the GSLT representatives and candid discussion with the advisory group.

Evaluation of GSLT's first year

GSLT has made good progress towards meeting its announced goals. The programme has a broad interdisciplinary base, but at the same time students are kept in contact

with their feeding disciplines by also having to meet the requirements of their individual disciplines at their home institutions. It has created an innovative programme with a combination of distance learning and more traditional teaching during intensive weeks. The courses being offered at GSLT are not available elsewhere and no single university in Sweden can attract enough students or support enough teachers to justify the offering of such courses. Students who might otherwise look abroad for comprehensive education in speech and language technology now can find this—with a concentration on Swedish and Scandinavian—closer to home. GSLT fills a unique niche in offering advanced training in Scandinavian speech and language technology.

GSLT has been able to attract a large number of qualified students and has been successful in creating a sense of community among the graduate students and others involved in the school at the different sites. Evidence for this is given in part by the fact that the graduate students themselves are active in organizing seminars and other activities and that the school has also led to collaboration between researchers beyond the bounds of GSLT e.g the Swedish treebank project. The fact that there are joint publications by graduate students at different sites in the school also shows that GSLT is playing an important role in the Swedish language technology community. The national graduate school provides a critical mass for advanced instruction and research by graduate students. Graduate students are themselves enthusiastic about the program and its value to them. Staff also benefit by team teaching and collaboration on supervision and are thereby encouraged to take part in more interactive research projects. Shared students is one way to facilitate collaboration between teachers and researchers and the result is an enhancing of research environments at each participating site.

It is also noteworthy that GSLT is successfully reaching beyond the bounds of its own organization with students from the whole of Scandinavia taking part in courses even though they are not registered as the school's students. The connection to industry which GSLT is in the progress of developing is extremely important for enabling technology transfer and research inspired by commercial concerns. In general the school is an important part of fulfilling the need to develop language technology for small languages such as Swedish and the other languages spoken in Sweden. It is also an important Swedish contribution to addressing the world wide need for language technologists in industry, education and research.

Perceived problems

Despite GSLT's clear initial success, there are problems which need to be addressed.

The school is hampered by insecure funding in the future when its current mandate by the government expires at the end of 2007. Thus it is currently not clear what the future will hold. It would indeed be a shame not to build on the large investment of time and money in building up the infrastructure, mechanisms, teaching etc. It seems difficult to apply for funds for a national cooperation of this nature from normal university

sources.

The exact relationship of GSLT to the participating universities is unclear and this too makes it difficult to plan for the future.

While GSLT pays for the teaching of courses, it nevertheless relies on good will on the part of its teachers and their departments to create time to teach at the graduate school that would otherwise have been committed to other tasks. As a national graduate school GSLT is not like a department which has a number of staff on which it can call in order to fulfil its commitments.

Recommendations

1. GSLT's graduate training should be continued in the future, maintaining and extending its course offerings and seminar/internal conference activities. This is important for the development of the research community at graduate student level, thus building for the long term future of the discipline in Sweden and more generally Scandinavia. The formal structure of the graduate school provides an important opportunity for graduate students to receive a broad interdisciplinary training and to participate in organizing activities such as the school's internal conference. This creates an opportunity for interaction and collaboration that would otherwise not be available. It would be a pity if future generations of students in the discipline could not have the same advantages.
2. GSLT should obtain a statement of intent from participating universities that future PhDs in the area will be encouraged to enrol in GSLT even in cases where full GSLT funding is not available for these students. This is an essential proof of the value of GSLT to researchers and educators in participating institutions.
3. In addition to the essential core of central funding, GSLT should seek funding at least to support these students' extra expenses and teaching of courses and administration.
4. GSLT should widen its relationship with industry to include user organizations that potentially have applications needs for GSLT's research, e.g. publishers, companies who process large amounts of documentation (such as the car industry), the media, and so on.
5. GSLT should consider possibilities for becoming a node in a European network of excellence. It should also look into options for funding by EU doctoral programmes (such as TMR, Marie Curie, Erasmus) and collaboration with other European PhD programmes e.g. perhaps a European Masters in Speech and Language Technology as the first step in doctoral training. Making a connection with ELSNET may be relevant here.
6. GSLT's courses should be advertised more, both to students and industry. More internet based courses, videotaping etc. should be considered to make the courses

more widely available and not entirely dependent on attendance at the intensive weeks for students outside the school. Distance learning can be used with to great advantage in graduate education if it is used in addition to face-to-face teaching rather than as a replacement for it.