

**University of the West of England**

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## Robots top the guest list for exclusive party to launch 'Walking with Robots'

**Institution of Engineering and Technology, Savoy Place, London  
23 October 2006 at 18.30**

Possibly the largest ever gathering of humans and robots will take place at the Institution of Engineering and Technology (IET), Savoy Place in London on Monday 23 October 2006. This unusual get together will launch '*Walking with Robots*' a nation-wide programme involving eight UK Universities all of whom have world class robotics-researchers. Each researcher has to bring a friend, but it can't be a human.

The programme's purpose is to get people of all ages engaged with cutting edge robotics research. It's being coordinated from Bristol UWE and led by Professor Alan Winfield. Three years funding has been awarded to the network by the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council.

Professor Noel Sharkey, EPSRC senior media fellow at the University of Sheffield and one of the roboticists at the core of the project explains:

"Robots are coming thick and fast with robot domestics, gardeners, cooks, companions, lovers, taxis, factory workers, space explorers, soldiers, maybe police and certainly pets.

"Public concern about these new metal 'friends' is whipped up by science fiction, but what are the facts? Will these robots think? Will they have emotions? Will they be mentally superior to us? Could my boss be a robot? Will they take over the planet and write interesting sit coms? The public need to be prepared for the revolution."

Professor Alan Winfield said, "We aim to find new ways of making robotics research accessible to as wide an audience as possible. The key is that we provide a platform to engage the general public in discussion around the myriad issues concerning robotics research which is growing in scope daily. Robotics is no longer the sole premise of engineers and computer scientists – we now engage a wider community with, for instance, palaeontologists, psychologists, artists, animal biologists and neuroscientists, realising that robotics can relate to and impact on their work."

Alan Winfield concludes, "The first '*Walking with Robots*' project is a Young Persons' Parliament. An opportunity for 16 to 20 year olds to debate, for example, whether robot should have rights."

Guests at the launch reception will include senior government representatives, funding council members, robotics experts, industry representatives, the media and of course a few robot friends, who will be allowed as much electricity as they can handle.

Ends

FFI: Jane Kelly or Mary Price, Press Officers

BRISTOL UWE

Tel: 0117 32 82208; fax: 0117 32 82341;

E-mail: [Jane.Kelly@uwe.ac.uk](mailto:Jane.Kelly@uwe.ac.uk) or [Mary.Price@uwe.ac.uk](mailto:Mary.Price@uwe.ac.uk)

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Jane Kelly

Media Relations & Internal Communications Manager

University of the West of England

Tel: +44 (0)117 328 2208