



These artworks were created by **The Painting Fool**, a program that “aspires to be an artist”. The software was developed by **Simon Colton, Michel Valstar and Maja Pantic**, computer

scientists at **Imperial College London**.

Graphic software such as Photoshop can create what looks like an Impressionist painting from a photograph almost instantly. The Painting Fool, by contrast, attempts to



reproduce the process of painting. It does so by filming an object, splitting the image into regions of colour and simulating how a person might paint each area. It also imitates the effects of media such as chalk and acrylic.

Dr Pantic and Dr Valstar developed a system to enable the program to recognise emotions by scanning the facial muscles captured by images. It has honed its skills, like generations of art students, by attempting to



copy the Old Masters. It also produced these “emotionally enhanced portraits” of Meera Senthilingam, producer of the BBC radio programme *The Naked Scientists*.

The results, which can be seen online, won a

British Computer Society Machine Intelligence Award in 2007.

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‘Service excellence’ means treating staff as customers

Northumbria academic claims approach would raise workforce morale. Sarah Cunnane reports

A business scholar has called for the implementation of “service excellence” in higher education and urged universities to treat staff as “internal customers”, not employees.

Hina Khan, programme leader for business creation at Newcastle Business School, makes the recommendations in a paper for the *Education and Training* journal.

She told *Times Higher Education* that she believed the time was right for universities to re-evaluate the way they thought about their staff, highlighting a mismatch between the drive to improve “student satisfaction” and the attention paid to staff morale.

“Treating academics as customers rather than employees would enhance functional and performance synergy,” Dr Khan said.

She added that this would give universities “sustainable competitive advantage and greater internal and external customer satisfaction”.

The paper, titled “Implementing service excellence in higher education”, was co-authored by Harry Matlay, professor of small business and enterprise development at Birmingham City Business School. It asserts that academy jobs should be viewed as “internal products”.

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It also says that a strong institutional culture that values “internal customers” could help universities benefit from “a motivated workforce, loyalty, high performance, innovation and a distinctive institutional competitive advantage”.

Dr Khan explained that it was important for universities to view staff as the “face” of their brands, and to provide training in communication and interpersonal skills to embed “service excellence” in the fabric of how institutions are run.

The paper contends that there is a lack of understanding about the needs of staff in many universities, and Dr Khan suggested that institutions should consider implementing staff-satisfaction surveys similar to those conducted among students.

“Nobody really tries to engage with the difficulties or problems that staff face. There are lots of gaps between service excellence given to

staff and to students,” she said.

The current approach adopted by universities was in contrast to the high-reward systems favoured in industry, she added, such as performance-related pay and bonuses. Dr Khan said that in some academic disciplines, such as accounting and economics, the absence of such benefits contributed to a dearth of staff as professionals could find greater satisfaction, not to mention better pay, elsewhere.

“As a senior lecturer, you face a pay band,” she said. “It doesn’t matter how many hours you work or how long you’ve been a lecturer: that’s your pay.”

Dr Khan denied that service excellence in the academy was an unwelcome managerial conceit.

“It’s not about form-filling and box-ticking, it’s about delivering the best to internal and external customers,” she said. sarah.cunnane@tsleducation.com