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When working together can breed excellence

ANDREW DENHOLM

THE importance of forging strong links between different university departments to produce world-class research is well illustrated by a current collaboration at Glasgow University.

Experts in computer science and bio-chemistry are pooling their resources and knowledge to try to understand how human cells communicate with

each other. By tracking the messages cells send to each other – and the problems that emerge when the wrong messages are sent – researchers hope to be able to lead the development of more effective drugs to tackle diseases such as cancer.

The research work, being led by Professor Muffy Calder from the university's department of computing science, came from a chance discussion with academics from the department of engineering biochemistry. Professor Calder's early work, in collaboration with British Telecom, centred on the study of communication problems between computers in telephone networks.

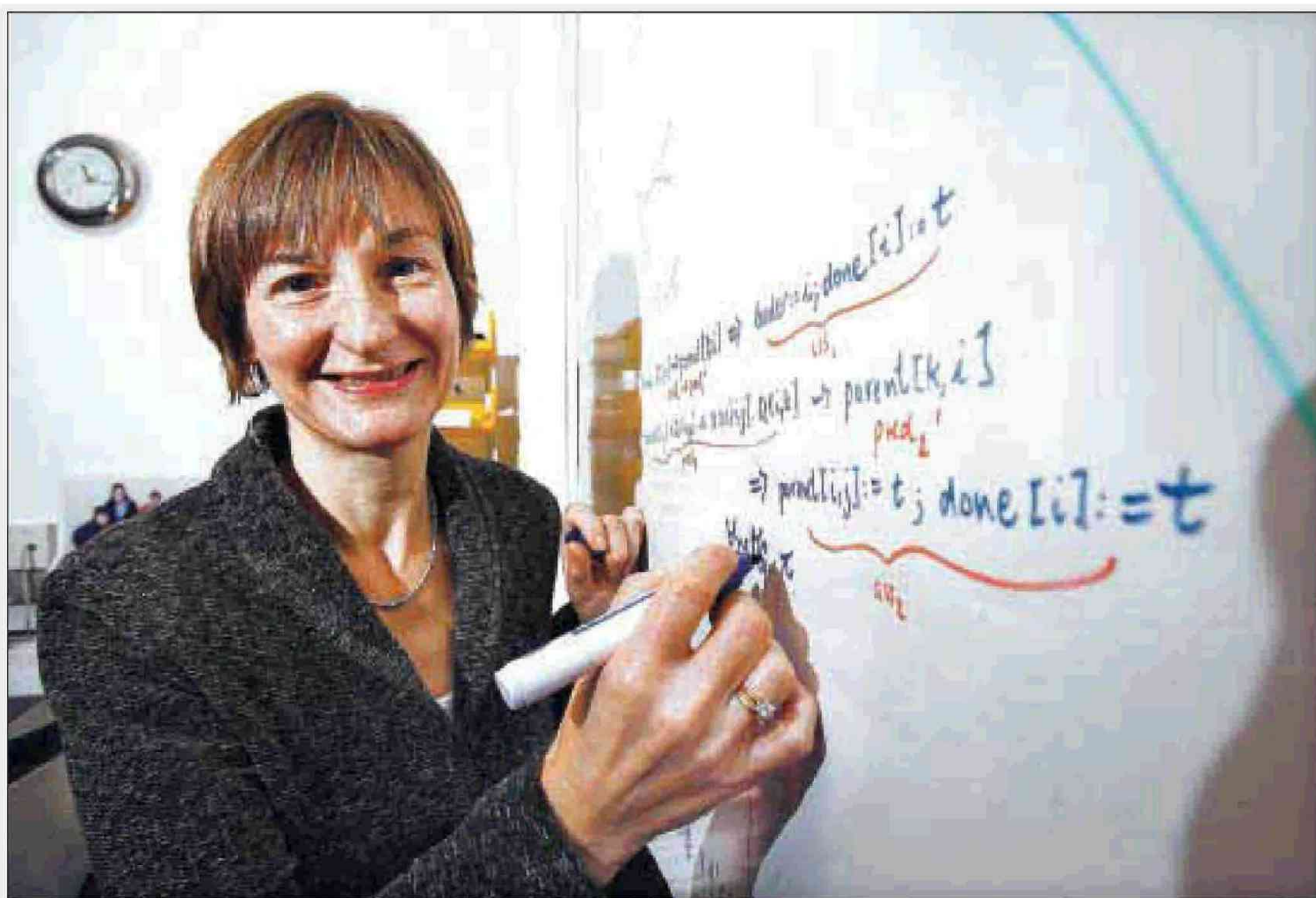
However, that chance discussion made her realise there were strong similarities between her work and the way human cells pass messages to each other. "Diseases are basically the result of a failure of communication between cells and, if we can see those processes at work using nanotechnology, we may be able to develop better drugs," she said.

"The messages cells send each other often result in chemical changes, but if we understand what is happening we could develop drugs which trigger more desirable chemical changes."



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LAYING DOWN A MARKER: Professor Calder's department of computing science works with biochemists at Glasgow University. Picture: Martin Shields