Transcription

EXCHANGE BETWEEN TIM HARRIES (CO-INVESTIGATOR FOR SESAME PROJECT) AND GRAHAM COATES (HEAD OF THE SESAME PROJECT)

Tim Harries: So, Graham, can you tell me a little bit about the SESAME project? What it's trying to achieve? What its aims are?

Graham Coates: Yes, certainly. The SESAME project is a 3-year project which is funded by the EPSRC and we've got six universities in the UK working together on how we might improve the way in which small businesses prepare for and respond to floods.

Tim Harries: Why small businesses, in particular?

Graham Coates: Small business are particularly important for two key reasons: one, is they make such a significant contribution to the UK economy, given that over 99% of businesses are small businesses; and, secondly, is that small businesses tend to have a lack of business continuity plans in place.

So there are six investigators in the team, working on various different integrative strands, but it's perhaps easiest to start with the interviewing side. So, Tina, Tim and Lindsey have interviewed a whole range of small businesses across the UK, and what they are doing, essentially, is capturing the actions and behaviours of businesses: what they did if they've experienced flooding; or what they think they might do if they *do* experience flooding, and that's going to be the input for the modelling work

Tim Harries: But you mentioned .. you mentioned modelling. So I think that's your part of the work, isn't it Graham?

Graham Coates: Modelling is my part of the work but also Nigel's, at Leeds University. My aspect of the work is trying to model a business (a small business) in terms of its behaviours, its actions, its response to certain events related to a flood and that, as I mentioned, comes from the interview data that Tina, Tim and Lindsey have pulled together.

Tim Harries: So the interviews give you some suggestions of how businesses behave and how they don't behave. Then what do you as a modeller do with that data?

Graham Coates: What we do is, we essentially furnish each computer model of a business with a set of rules that govern the behaviour or the operation of that business. So, it will be: if there's no flood water, then continue production as normal; if it starts to flood, then lift up IT equipment might be one thing they might do immediately –that kind of thing. The other aspect of computer modelling that's important to mention is that, when I'm modelling a small business, I've clearly got to have a flood event. So we get that data from Leeds University. They provide us

with flood data at half-hour intervals over a ... it could be a one- or two-day or even ten-day period.

Tim Harries: OK.

Graham Coates: And then we can use our computer models of small businesses, with that timeline of a flood, to see what they would do.

Tim Harries: So, the computer is, in effect, kind of simulating the behaviour of a business hour by hour and, at the same time, it's feeding into that behaviour different levels of flood water.

Graham Coates: Yes.

Tim Harries: And then, at the other end, you get some kind of output showing you the consequences of different behaviours and the consequences of the flood water.

Graham Coates: Exactly. So, for example, we might have a small business that chooses to hold its stock above ground level. So, if it's flooded, then that stock is not damaged, for example (a simple example).

Tim Harries: What we've heard from businesses themselves is that the most productive thing is for them to be able to talk to each other about this issue. So, it's no good an academic or government preaching to businesses. They want to hear what their colleagues have been doing. So, we're working with businesses and with other stakeholders to create a website (an interactive website) where businesses can talk to each other, hear each other's views, hear what the experts are saying, reflect on the whole issue of flood risk and develop their ideas and their thinking for what to do about it.