

Extract from the minutes of Information Committee, 16 February and 6 March 1998

98/13 Student Access to Computers

The Committee **considered** a letter from the Chair of the Board of Studies Politics relating to student access to word-processing facilities, together with responses from the Director of the Computing Service and the Board for Graduate Schools. Both the Department of Politics and the Board for Graduate Schools were proposing that, when a computing room had been booked for teaching, it should be mandatory that students were permitted to use any free machines, but that the tutor should have the right to eject any such student who caused disturbance or distraction.

After some discussion, the Committee **decided**:

- (a) that tutors should be “strongly encouraged” to make free machines available at the start of teaching sessions, but should have the right not to permit students to enter the room once a class had commenced;
- (b) that the situation should be reviewed in a year’s time.

Mike Jinx, Director Computer Services

cc Professor K. Fidler, Deputy Vice-Chancellor and Chair,
Teaching Committee
Professor Alan Forrest, Chair, Graduate Schools Committee

12th January 1998

Dear Mike,

Provision of Work-Processing Facilities

You may recall that I have written to you before about this. At its meeting last term, the Board of Studies heard with alarm from its student representatives that students are still encountering great difficulties in finding machines where they can word-process their essays. The same complaint was voiced on behalf of the Department's graduate students at the meeting of Graduate Committee.

The Board finds itself in a quandary. On the one hand, it is constantly urged by the University to provide its students with additional transferable skills, so it has gradually moved towards making it a requirement that all written work be submitted typed (as from next session, this will be the requirement for all students, undergraduate and graduate, from the very start). On the other hand, if the University is not able to supply the necessary facilities, the Department will not be able to enforce its regulations. This will put it at a severe disadvantage when it is investigated by the TQA inspectors (and we anticipate that the period of teaching and University provision of support services under investigation will run from 1998/9). Furthermore, we have the worry that particularly in the case of undergraduate students from overseas and of graduate students we operate in a highly competitive market and will be unable to sustain our growth if we cannot give students the facilities they have been led to expect (by both the Department and by the University), and which they are entitled to think would be provided by a modern and high-ranking university.

There is a short-term and a long-term dimension to this. In the short-term, we are told that when a computing room is booked for teaching, it is at the discretion of the tutor whether or not other students are permitted to use any free machines. We suggest that, facilities being so scarce, it be mandatory that students are permitted to use any free machines (the tutor having the right to eject any such student who causes any disturbance or distraction).

To: Professor Kel Fidler, Chair, Information Committee

cc: Dr Mike Jinks
Sarah Clark

From: Philip Simison

Date: 4 February 1998

Dear Kel

Provision of word-processing facilities

At its meeting on 20 January 1998, the Board for Graduate Schools received a copy of the attached letter to the Director of the Computing Service from the graduate school board in Politics expressing concern about the accessibility of computing facilities to graduate students.

In discussion, it was noted that the Computing Service had booked the computing room in Derwent College entirely for ILIAD teaching purposes during the autumn term 1997.

The Board agreed to recommend to the Information Committee that - as suggested by the Department of Politics - when a computing room was booked for teaching, it should be mandatory that students were permitted to use any free machines, but that the tutor should have the right to eject any such student who caused any disturbance or distraction.

I should be grateful if the Information Committee could consider this recommendation at its next meeting.

Yours sincerely

THE UNIVERSITY *of York*

MEMORANDUM

Date: 16 January 1998

To: Peter Nicholson, Politics
Mark Evans, Politics

From: Mike Jinks, Computing Service

cc: Kel Fidler
Alan Forrest

Provision of Wordprocessing Facilities

Thank you for your recent note in which you raise both the longer term issues and a shorter term suggestion.

Taking the longer term issue first, the level of PC provision in classrooms and the 24 hour study centres is increasingly inadequate for the current needs of students. Both the Computing Service and 'the University', including the Vice-Chancellor, have received complaints about access this year and there is ample evidence of queues etc.

As ever, the problem is one of resourcing. The decision on the capital allocation to the Computing Service for 1997/8 was delayed until October so it was not possible to make any enhancements to the PC provision during the summer, but I am happy to report that some funding was available to provide some additional facilities. We will be replacing the terminals in the Alcuin College 24-hour study centre by new multimedia PCs during this term and will be redeploying the terminals into the vacant places in G/169. Thus more PCs will be available and more access devices in total will be provided. Nonetheless, this is a relatively modest increase which will not solve the underlying problem but may provide some temporary amelioration. We hope that, in the medium term, the level of provision of computing facilities will be driven by the Teaching and Learning, and Research Strategies which the University is developing, and hence that resources will be more in line with requirements.

You suggest a more immediate way in which a few more devices could be made available, viz allowing students access by right to taught classes in the PC classrooms to utilise any spare places. As you rightly state, the current position is that students may use spare places in the classrooms if the lecturer taking the class is happy for them to do so. This is very much a matter of personal preference for the lecturer and will depend on what is being taught. It would be wrong of the Computing Service to attempt to define how the academic staff undertake their teaching - we provide facilities to support their role.

It is not clear where a decision on your suggestion would be taken in the University. Teaching Committee is one possibility but I suspect that the issues involved are of such generality and have such policy implications that GAB might be a more appropriate place to air the issues.

Since the Computing Service is simply providing a centrally timetabled facility, we are happy for the facilities to be used in whatever ways are deemed best for the University as a whole.

Mike Jinks, Director
Computing Service

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3 June 1999

Dear Mike

Provision of Computing Facilities for Students

As you will know we have our TQA coming up in November, and one of the things which students regularly complain about is the difficulty of access to the network. This happened most recently at the visit to the Department by a panel from the University Teaching Committee - hence their message to you. Thank you for offering to come and talk to us about it.

We have now discussed this matter at a meeting of the Departmental Teaching Committee, and also yesterday at the newly formed Departmental Teaching Resources Committee. John Illingworth attended the latter meeting, so he is aware of the situation, which I will summarise here as well. An actual meeting may not therefore be necessary.

There appear to be several issues related to network access:

- a) Students find it hard to gain access in the daytime. This impacts most strongly on students who live off campus.
- b) Students who wish only to check their e-mail are faced with a lengthy logon period.
- c) The Department now relies very heavily on e-mail for communicating with students, and as a result of a) and b) communication with students who live off campus is difficult.

With regard to a), I presume there is no solution other than the large-scale allocation of funds. However it is worth mentioning that several people who have seen our TQA self-assessment document have remarked that "200 PCs doesn't appear to be a very generous provision for a University of this size."

For b) and c) we suggest that the provision of more level-1 e-mail terminals would alleviate some of the pressure all round, especially if some were provided in all Halls of Residence.

From the Departmental point of view, a major lack is the provision of sufficiently *large* computer classrooms. As a result, in a number of cases staff are obliged to give lectures and practical sessions twice over which is not a good use of staff resources and also results in inefficient timetabling. I believe that G169 could contain up to 72 PCs, although at present only 48 are provided.

cont...

May I urge you to give the upgrading of G169 to 72 PCs a very high priority, so that it is available in this form for the extensive use we make of these facilities in the Autumn term?

I am copying this letter to Keith Mander as Chair of the Computing Committee, in the hope of enlisting the Committee's support for these suggestions.

Yours sincerely

Rod Greenhow
Deputy Head of Department, Physics

cc
Dr KC Mander
Mr JJ Illingworth
Dr RJ Greenall