

key notes

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Computing at York: The Early Years



Peter Roberts reminisces...

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Using ColdFusion with the Data Warehouse

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From the Editor

The cover stars might look like spin driers, but they're actually disk drives. On page 6 Peter Roberts, now semi-retired, recalls the introduction of Computing to the University of York in the 1970s.



Managed Learning Environments, which provide the facilities for remote learning are attracting an increasing amount of interest within the University. On page 5 Debra Fayter gives an update on the progress of the evaluation of Web CT and Blackboard.



Joanne Casey

Keynotes on the web

Back copies of Keynotes can be found at:
<http://www.york.ac.uk/services/cserv/offdocs/keynotes/>

**ILIAD and Millenium
Volunteers
Sue Hodges**

The York Millennium Volunteers project is both a city wide initiative and part of a national campaign, designed to help anyone aged 16-24 to share their skills, ideas, time and energies with their community. Participants may earn nationally recognised certificates for giving 100 or 200 hours to community work over a period of a year.

The University of York is one of the project's founder partners. A team of three, based in the Portakabin at the rear of the Centre for Norwegian Studies, assists students in planning a volunteering placement and in matching students' skills and interests to an appropriate opportunity. Placements may be as diverse as landscaping a garden for an old people's home or organising fundraising events.

Of course, many voluntary organisations require help with their computing needs. Therefore Millennium Volunteers has linked up with ILIAD for the Workplace in the hope of placing some of our students. We hope that this will encourage students to enrol for our courses and to take part in the project.

Pigeon Holes

It is our belief that the pigeon holes in the entrance lobby to the Computing Service are no longer used outside normal hours. In consultation with the University Security Manager we are looking to relocate the pigeon holes and lock the external door. If you do still require this service when the main building is closed, would you please discuss your requirements with Brian Souter, tel 3814 or e-mail *bs1*.

**Easter and May Bank
Holidays**

The Computing Service building, including the Information Desk and entrance lobby, will be closed on Good Friday (13 April), Easter Monday (16 April), the Early May Bank Holiday (7 May) and the Late May Bank Holiday (28 May). All computer systems, including the PCs and printers in the colleges, will be available as for a normal weekend.

**Staff News
Mike Jinks**

Congratulations to Robert Demaine for his success in his D Phil viva. His thesis, entitled "Individual and Institution in the Musical Life of Leeds, 1900-1914", is the result of six years of study in the Music Department as an antidote to computing, and also illustrates the wide range of backgrounds of the staff of the Computing Service. As Head of Infrastructure, Robert is deeply involved with technology, but it is good that excellence in a wide range of disciplines, traditionally associated with the Renaissance, is still possible today.

**Staff & Graduate Training Courses Summer 2001
John Illingworth**

Once again we have a programme of basic and intermediate courses scheduled for the summer term. All course registration will be done by the Computing Service Information Desk and may be carried out by internal mail, by phone (ext 3838), by email, or in person (9am-5.15pm Mon-Thurs, 9am-4.15pm Fri) up to the end of the Friday preceding the course, when courses will be confirmed or cancelled and participants informed. When registering:

Make sure that you are registered as a Computing Service user and know your username and password.

Make sure that you fulfil the prerequisites for the course.

If after registering, you find that you cannot attend, please let us know. We may be able to reassign your place to someone else.

**Network Diary
Joanne Casey**

The Network Diary project ran throughout the week beginning 22 January. A group of volunteers, from various departments, undertook to record any problems they encountered using their networked PCs during the time.

Forms were distributed to all participants asking them to fill in details of the problem, its duration and resolution. 14 diaries were returned, and one kept in house.

A total of 45 problems were detailed, an average of 3 per user over the course of a week (5 working days in most cases). Nearly half of these problems were concerned with the internet and email, and it is apparent that some of these were outside our control. Computing Service staff are looking at the results which we hope will enable us to get a clearer view of our users' experiences of computing.

Windows 95 news

John Robinson gives answers to common problems

Message of the Day display

The application that displays the message of the day on supported Windows 95 PCs was replaced over the Christmas vacation. The new application is in fact a mini-web-browser, so that one application can show both the urgent notices (planned maintenance, etc) and longer news items. The application is better sized and has scroll bars, thus making reading the text of messages much easier. Please do read these messages, as they are a primary means of letting you know about restrictions (and improvements!) to the service.

Self-help, and helping us help you, when you have problems

We are well aware that campus computer use is a 24/7 activity (to use the jargon), but the Computing Service is only staffed during office hours. We have tried to provide access to on-line facilities to help you get over problems whenever they occur. Here are some of the things you can do:

Search YorkWeb

There is a search engine that covers the University's web pages and a number of departmental pages (including the Computing Service at: <http://www.york.ac.uk/services/cserv>) have search engines restricted to their own contents. Either of these can help with common problems, such as getting the correct margins for footnotes in a WordPerfect document. Just start Netscape, go to the University or Computing Service home page and click the Search button on the toolbar near the bottom of the screen. Type 'footnote margins' into the Search For box, and press Enter. You will be shown a summary of a number of likely web pages and can click on the most useful looking ones to get the answer you want. This is often quicker than following the 'proper channels' of Start | Programs | Text Processing | !Help and Documentation | WordPerfect 8/9 Hints.

Ask on newsgroups

We provide local newsgroups, including *york.csr.help* and *york.talk.technical* where you can ask questions and others members of the University may provide answers. There are also lots of Usenet news groups and groups hosted by the major software suppliers. So if you have problems with C++ programming, you are very likely to get an answer from *comp.lang.c++.on.news.york.ac.uk*, or from *borland.public.cpp.language* on *forums.inprise.com*. A good way to find out about suitable newsgroups is to type some keywords into an Internet search engine such as *www.askjeeves.com*, *www.ixquick.com* or *www.google.com*.

If you need to contact the Computing Service with a problem using a supported PC, it will help us to give you a speedy answer if you can tell us as much about the problem as possible. It is very useful to know if the problem affects just a single PC (try a different PC), or a single username (get someone else to log into your PC). Does the problem affect all applications (eg, "I can't print anything, from WordPerfect, SPSS or Netscape"), or just one ("I can't print from Corel-draw")? Does the problem affect only one document, or every document ("the equations in this week's essay don't display, but last week's essay is fine")?

Recent problems

We have had a couple of recent problems which are not so common as to warrant full-scale alerts, nor so rare as to be considered isolated cases.

One is a problem concerning Quattro Pro 9 spreadsheets growing very large. The original network installation of QP9 left the maximum sizes for spreadsheets at the supplier's (stupidly large) default values. Some operations extend the spreadsheet rows or columns to these very large sizes, resulting in large, cumbersome and fragile files. There is a fix, and instructions as to how to compress large files back to a sensible size, at: <http://www.york.ac.uk/services/cserv/help/spread/bigfiles.htm>

continued overleaf

Withdrawal of Windows 95 OEM version

Doug Moncur

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Video driver problems

A known problem with certain video cards, which causes Maple plots not to display or print (see <http://www.york.ac.uk/services/cserv/help/win95/maple-noplot.htm>) has re-surfaced in a couple of new guises. SPSS Interactive Graphs suffer in the same way, and with a few PCs WordPerfect 8 toolbar icons turn into black squares (very odd, and why has it started to happen *now?*). Turning off the video card acceleration (as in the fix for Maple) seems to cure both these problems. In fact, if you are having troubles with Windows 95 displays, this can often solve them, and unless you play 3d space war games during your breaks, you are unlikely to notice any slow down.

Similarly, a number of people have had problems with printing which have been traced to printer driver problems. And, strangely enough, Windows printer driver functions also interact with the screen display. We can keep the printer drivers on classroom PCs (where the range of available printers is limited, and known to us) up to date. But on office PCs, where you can use local and networked printers of virtually any sort, we cannot keep track of which printers are in use and we cannot remotely update drivers on these PC's hard drives. So if you are having trouble with printing (lines missing, text boxes turning black, mis-aligned text, wrong fonts etc), check that you have the latest drivers for the actual model of printer you are using.

As of 31 December 2000 Microsoft have withdrawn the OEM (Original Equipment Manufacturer) version of Windows 95, effectively signalling that Windows 95 is scheduled for withdrawal. We understand from Microsoft that the probable withdrawal date will be sometime during summer 2002.

The OEM version is the version that manufacturers buy from Microsoft to install on the machines they supply to the University, and which they can customise to a limited extent.

Viglen have indicated that they can continue to supply machines with Windows 95 for the time being but that there will be a £25 additional charge for doing so as they will have to supply the retail version which is packaged differently and supplied at a different price.

Compaq cannot supply machines directly with Windows 95 but machines can be degraded to Windows 95 by buying machines with Windows 98 and obtaining and installing Windows 95 separately.

Dan expect to be able to supply machines with Windows 95 for the time being but it is not yet clear if there will be an additional charge for doing so.

It is currently possible to obtain Windows 95 under Select and degrade a machine from Windows 98 to Windows 95, but users should be aware that some features of newer machines may not be fully supported under Windows 95. In particular machines with Intel 815e Easton motherboards require a separate sound card, as the on board sound circuitry is not recognised by Windows 95.

The Computing Service is working to implement a supported Windows 2000 service from this summer. This service will eventually replace the supported Windows 95 service. Until the new Windows 2000 service is up and running people who require a supported connection on a new machine should continue to specify machines with Windows 95. Anyone who wishes to purchase a machine and does not require a supported connection should specify a machine with Windows 98 in preference to Windows 95. Laptop users should specify machines with Windows 98 where possible to circumvent the increased memory and processor requirements of Windows ME.

Desktop machines should be purchased with a minimum of 128Mb RAM where possible to simplify any later upgrade to Windows 2000. In the case of laptops obtained from Toshiba with Windows ME, again an upgrade to 128Mb RAM is recommended.

Windows 2000 machines can only currently be connected to the network as unsupported connections.

Further information regarding operating system availability will be made available as soon as possible on the Computing Service web site.



Training Room

H/B40, our staff IT training room near the Print Unit in Heslington Hall, should have been refurbished by the time this goes to press. It should now look like a properly designed training facility, rather than a room furnished with second-hand bits and bobs and a few PCs. It is being fitted with proper PC tables - like those in the Langwith PC classroom, with all the cables out of the way. It will have new chairs upholstered in green, a new carpet, and will have been repainted. There will be 6 flat screen PCs for those attending courses, a tutor's PC, a permanent projector and a new printer. It will also be possible to use it as a meeting room or project office.

A TESA lock is also going to be installed. Members of MIS, the DBAs and anyone else who regularly uses it for courses will have access via their security cards. A card will be available for signing out from Computing Service for anyone else who needs access.

JACS codes

The JACS (Joint Academic Coding System) group has looked at harmonisation of the course codes used by UCAS and HESA. They want us to change about 50 of our undergraduate course codes for the 2002/2003 entry, which we would have to have in place this September, ready for 2002 admissions. It will cause us a few problems where we will have to re-use codes that were previously used on old courses - we need to keep the old course details so our historical records will be complete, but the MAC system insists on a unique course code, regardless of date. It is also proposed that the code currently in use by History of Art be used for Archaeology in future, presenting us with a situation where live courses with the same code but different start years are entirely different courses.

Departments and sub-departments

In the MAC system, we are only permitted 2 levels of organisation - departments and sub-departments. Everything has had to be squeezed to fit into this model, which has led to some strange reporting, and departments having 2 codes in areas like Estates, where they really have 4 or 5 tiers of organisation.

As part of the YIMS project, we want to make sure that any new systems we acquire can more accurately reflect our organisation. There is a group now looking at the departmental structures and trying to map how they actually work. For instance, some departments are held as sub-departments of another department, when in reality, they are independent. Departments like the Centre for Medieval Studies run courses, but don't employ any teaching staff directly, so with our current systems we cannot work out the staff to student ratio for their courses. Such matters are issues the group will be considering and consulting with departments, where appropriate. If we want good, accurate management information out of our new systems, we need to get our fundamental reporting structures right.

The Computing Service course "Connecting Databases to the Web" provides an introduction to the ColdFusion development platform. It is generally aimed at staff who are interested in collecting/disseminating information over the Web, to and from a database created and 'owned' by that member of staff.

A new course "Using ColdFusion with the Data Warehouse" has been designed to build on these ColdFusion skills by exploring the specific issues around connecting the University Data Warehouse to the Web. The course is aimed at members of staff who are already experienced in using the Data Warehouse.

Topics covered include:

- how to access Data Warehouse databases and tables
- an overview of tables and relationships
- current Data Warehouse security & the potential for ColdFusion to breach this
- options for maintaining security
- authenticating user access
- future developments

If you would be interested in attending a future run of this course, please email Geoff Houlton gph2@york.ac.uk

Online solutions for OKI printer users

Oki have produced a website containing online manuals and details of where to obtain spares and consumables for older Oki printers.

To check out the site go to:
<http://my.okidata.com>

Computing at York - The Early Years

Peter Roberts recalls the unimagined growth of computing during his first years at York University...

The story of computing at York began in November 1964 with a meeting between two members of the Mathematics department, Paddy Kennedy and Victor Hale, with the University's architect to discuss a building to house an as yet unfunded computer. Following this meeting, in February 1965 the Vice - Chancellor, Lord James, wrote to the UGC requesting £120,000 for a computer at York. At about this time the Flowers Committee was considering the question of computing provision at British universities and, as a result of its report, the Computer Board was set up to provide and oversee computing facilities at universities. It recommended in January 1966 a grant to York of £50000 to obtain an "upgrade able Elliott 4100 configuration". The Elliott 4100 was originally scheduled for installation early in 1967 and was finally installed and accepted in November 1967.

In April 1966 the sub Department of Computation (within Mathematics) was set up, with David Burnett-Hall appointed as Lecturer in Charge and Director of Computation. The initial 4100 system comprised a 4130 processor, 16K (24 bit) words of memory, a card reader, paper tape reader and punch, 3 tape drives and a graph plotter. The system was to run under the T30C operating system. However, even before delivery, it was found that the operating system would not fit into the 16K store, so this was upgraded to 32K of 6 microsecond store. At the end of 1969 the Computer Board funded a further upgrade of three 4megabyte discs, together with an Autonomous Transfer Unit which allowed data transfer directly between

the store and tape and disk subsystems, without interrupting the central processor. At the same time the University considered purchasing with its own funds a fourth 4 megabyte disc drive but decided not to, because it was inconceivable that the University would ever generate that amount of data.

At the beginning of 1970 a Computer Manager was appointed...

In the first full year of use of the system, 66% of the work was done in Fortran, 26% in Algol and the University's administrative work (payroll, cheque printing, invoicing and statistics) took 8% of the available power and was done in NEAT and Language H. In that year Physics used 40% of the power, Chemistry 22%, Biology and Mathematics 10% each and Economics 6%.

At the beginning of 1970 a Computer Manager was appointed, to be followed in the summer by two fellows, one to look after systems programming and one for applications. A Computing Assistant was also appointed. During that year the DES1 disc based operating system was brought into use, though the T30C system also continued since it provided facilities not available in the newer DES1 system.

During the Christmas vacation 1970 the system was further upgraded by the addition of a further 4 megabyte disc drive - which was now perceived as

needed - and at Easter 1971 the 32K 6 microsecond store was replaced by 64K of two microsecond store, as well as a multiplexer and eight teletypes to provide a multi-access system based on the KOS operating system developed at the University of Kent. During 1972 the old tape based T30C operating system was withdrawn and the DES "multiaccess system" introduced. However the older single access disk system DES1 continued in use, due to the unreliability of DES2.

In the summer of 1972 Dr I C Pyle was appointed as Professor of Computer Science and plans were laid for a new computer building to house a replacement for the Elliott 4100. Pending such a replacement system the Elliott was further upgraded to 128k of store in August 1973, together with a 1200 line per minute printer. Then in the summer of 1974 a DEC PDP11 was connected to the system, to provide a front end server with a 56Mbyte disc and a multiplexer supporting 32 terminals. Two visual display units were purchased.

By now computing both as an academic discipline and a University Service was well established, so the University looked forward eagerly to the next stage of computing at York. However the University rejected the suggestion that a British made system from ICL be obtained and, instead, wished to purchase a system from the USA. This matter had to be referred to the Department of Industry, so it was not until the summer of 1976 that the 4100 was finally replaced.



Computing Service Address

Computing Service	Telephone:	Switchboard (01904) 430000
University of York		Direct dialling (01904) 43 followed by ext no.
Heslington	Fax:	(01904) 433740
YORK YO10 5DD	Email:	<i>username@york.ac.uk</i>

Also, try the World Wide Web: <http://www.york.ac.uk/services/cserv/>

Information Desk

Telephone: ext 3838
 Email: *infodesk*

The Information Desk is open from 9am to 5.15pm Monday to Thursday, and 9am to 4.15pm Friday (*may be closed for training Wednesdays 2pm-3pm*), for problem solving, advice and information, fault reporting, network connections, file conversion, sales, course bookings, registration and documentation. Printed output can be collected from the lobby entrance which is open from 8am to midnight.

Computing Service Staff:

Director:	Mike Jinks	3801	<i>kmj1</i>
Departmental Secretary:	Lorraine Moor	3801	<i>lsm1</i>
Head of Infrastructure:	Robert Demaine	3808	<i>rld1</i>
Head of User Services:	John Illingworth	3803	<i>jjj1</i>
Head of MIS:	Kay Mills-Hicks	2101	<i>kmh8</i>
Head of Technical Services:	Doug Moncur	3815	<i>dgm1</i>
Head of Systems:	Andrew Smith	3809	<i>abs4</i>
Operations Manager:	Brian Souter	3814	<i>bs1</i>
Head of Networking:	John Mason	3813	<i>jrm13</i>
Information Officer:	Joanne Casey	3805	<i>jmc8</i>

Sue Bolton	2102	<i>sjb28</i>	Paul Hodgson	4347	<i>ph25</i>
Mike Brudenell	3811	<i>pmb1</i>	Geoff Houlton	2100	<i>gph2</i>
Lisa Burkinshaw	3818	<i>ljb4</i>	Jenny Jackson	4455	<i>jj5</i>
John Byrne	3812	<i>jcb1</i>	Chris Kilgour	4454	<i>crhk1</i>
David Chambers	3742	<i>dac6</i>	John Marsden	3832	<i>jpm1</i>
Michael Clark	3745	<i>mpc3</i>	Darren Munday	3821	<i>dam6</i>
Arthur Clune	3129	<i>ajc22</i>	Nicola Normandale	4695	<i>ncn1</i>
Paul Conacher	4346	<i>pac1</i>	Colin Rea	3817	<i>cr9</i>
Steve Downes	3741	<i>sd21</i>	Chris Reece	3807	<i>car7</i>
Debra Fayter	3839	<i>daf3</i>	John Robinson	3833	<i>jsr1</i>
Ken Finch	4452	<i>kf1</i>	Sam Scott	3817	<i>svs2</i>
Rob Fletcher	3816	<i>rpf1</i>	Daniel Shelton	4349	<i>ds23</i>
Kevin Gardner	3739	<i>pkg4</i>	Sam Vines	3749	<i>sccv1</i>
Chris Gowland	3823	<i>cg1</i>	Nick Walker	3897	<i>njw8</i>
Peter Halls	3806	<i>pjh1</i>	Timothy Willson	2123	<i>ftmw1</i>
Linda Hearn	3800	<i>lch8</i>	Mark Wilson	3826	<i>mw119</i>
Sue Hodges	3839	<i>sh32</i>	Michael Woodhead	3825	<i>mw28</i>