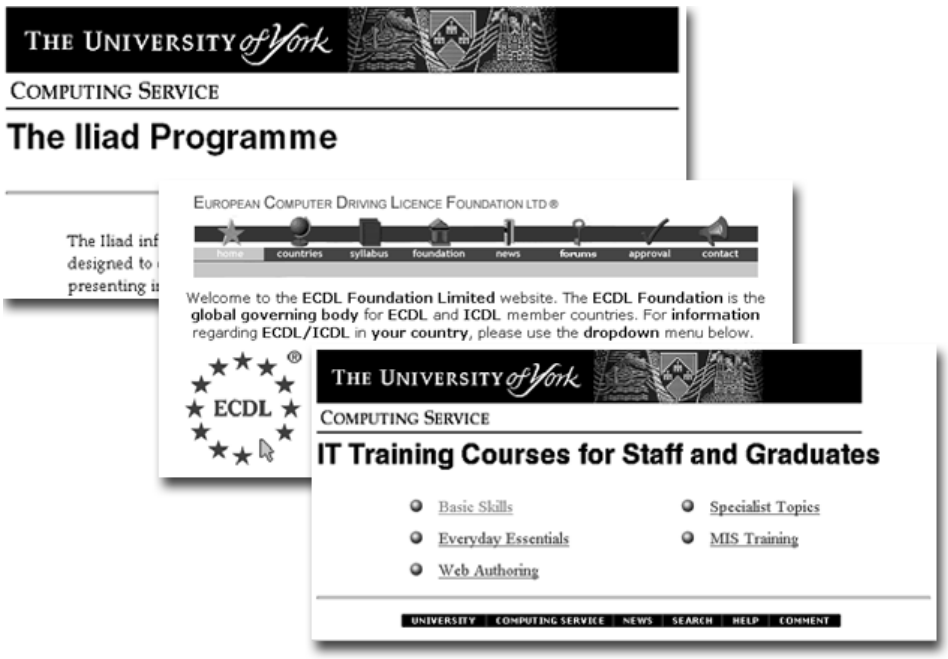
THE UNIVERSITY of York
Computing Service

Keynotes

Volume 28 Number 2 December 2001

Training special:

Course schedule, Iliad, ECDL



Also in this Issue:

Database facilities
Data Warehouse
Classrooms
Staff news

contents

Volume 28, Number 2

From the Editor

With a number of our staff and graduate courses heavily over-subscribed in the Autumn term, the Spring course schedules have been eagerly awaited. Find them in the centre of this issue, with John Illingworth giving a rundown on page 5.

❖❖❖

The Computing Service is currently assessing the possibilities of introducing the European Computer Driving Licence to the University. See Debra Fayter's article on page 4 for more information.

❖❖❖

As well as the new study area opening in Halifax Court and the facility to be provided in Alcuin, the Computing Service has installed the new Health Studies classroom in Alcuin East Wing. Turn to page 3 for further details and photos.

Joanne Casey

Contents

News in Brief

Finance transactions in the Data Warehouse 1
Replacement of the SGI O2s in D/104 1
New computing facilities - why the delay? 1
Student networked services 1

News

Central database facilities for research and academics 2
UK Mirror Service 2
Staff News 3
New Alcuin classroom 3
Licensed... to compute: ECDL 4
Iliad for University 2001 5
Classroom etiquette 5
Spring course schedule 5

Keynotes on the web

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

Keynotes

Finance transactions in the Data Warehouse

F T M Willson

Just a reminder that with effect from 1 January 2002 the nominal ledger transaction data available in the Data Warehouse Finance Database will be reduced, in accordance with the agreed schedule, to data from the financial year 2000 onwards (i.e. 1 August 1999 to date). This policy ensures that transactions for the current financial year (2001) and the whole of the previous financial year are always available. If you have good reason to require data from the financial years before 2000 you are advised to contact the Computing Service Information Desk (email **infodesk** or telephone extension 3838), giving details of what is required and why. MIS will then endeavour to provide the report you require directly from the MAC Finance application.

Please Note: Balance details for all Cost Centre : Detail Code : Analysis Code combinations are always available from the Data Warehouse in both current and archive files for all the financial years held in the MAC Finance application as are all transaction and balance details for Research Projects.

Replacement of the SGI O2s in D/104

Rob Fletcher

The Computing Service will be setting up a project to manage the replacement of the Silicon Graphics O2 Unix workstations in D/104. These systems are only available for research users and undergraduates requiring access to the special facilities provided by these systems. It is our aim to replace these with extremely capable systems in terms of processing power, graphics and multimedia support. We will make sure that these new systems will continue to run as much of the current suite of advanced software as possible, and in the most efficient way. We may need to provide additional software to replace that provided with the current platform (as part of the software bundle with the IRIX operating system). We will also be looking to extend the capabilities and range of facilities available on these new systems.

If anyone has concerns about this replacement, e.g. software availability; time to re-write teaching materials; possible change of platform, they should contact Dr R P Fletcher (**rpf1**) in the first instance as should those with suggestions (e.g. requests for additional hardware and software) for extending the capabilities of these systems in order to embrace new areas of advanced teaching and research.

New computing facilities - why the delay?

Joanne Casey

Halifax College

Many of you will have been disappointed, as we in the Computing Service were, that the facility in Halifax College was not available by the beginning of this academic year. We apologise for the delay which was a consequence of University budgetary constraints. The good news is that the PCs will be in place this term. The furniture is due to be installed in the week beginning 26 November and the PCs will be available shortly after.

Alcuin College

The new study centre in Alcuin is currently on hold, as changes to the building plan mean that suitable accommodation is not yet available. In addition, University budgetary constraints have restricted the number of PCs which can be funded. Discussions are continuing, but no decision is likely before the middle of the Spring term. We will keep you informed as progress is made.

Student networked services

Robert Demaine

A working group chaired by the Director of the Computing Service, Dr Mike Jinks, has been given, by the University's Information Committee, the task of developing a strategic solution for the provision of networked services to student study bedrooms on campus. A number of options are under consideration, and preliminary discussions have already taken place with potential suppliers and partners. Tests to compare different technologies for service delivery are to be conducted in the near future. It is expected that the chosen solution will begin a phased rollout in September 2002.

G/022

John Illingworth

As you may have noticed the PC room G/022, normally a 24-hour study area, has been booked for classes during the initial part of the term. This was because of delays in the completion of a new 65-seat Windows 2000 PC classroom in Alcuin East Wing. This new room belongs to the Health Studies department, but may be booked by other departments when Health Studies are not using it.

By the time you read this, bookings of G/022 should have tailed off to a very small amount, andwill cease by the end of term.

Central database facilities for research and academics

Lisa Burkinshaw

The Computing Service provides a central database facility called Interbase. It is a facility that allows staff to create and store databases which can be used for research and academic purposes.

The benefits of using Interbase on Skelder include the ability to share databases with other users allowing more than one user to access a database at one time, and the facility to store large amounts of data. Also, Skelder itself is a dedicated server for user databases and gets backed up regularly. Database owners can set security on their own databases specifying which users can access which information in their databases.

Interbase is a Relational Database Management System. This software has recently been upgraded to Interbase 6 Open Source version.

Once registered for Interbase, users are allocated a specific area on Skelder where they can create new databases. The area will have the following path: **skelder:/mounts/data/***username/*. Currently there are 185 databases held on Skelder.

There is a tool available on the network which can be used to access Interbase. On supported Windows 95 and Windows 2000 PCs this tool can be found under **Start | Programs | Utilities & Extras | Unsupported Utilities | IB Windows ISQL**.

Interbase databases can also be accessed by other software packages including Paradox, Delphi, C++ Builder which uses the Borland Database Engine (BDE) to connect to Interbase and MS Access which uses Open Database Connectivity (ODBC) to connect to Interbase. They can also be accessed on the web via Coldfusion applications.

To register as an Interbase user go to: **www.york.ac.uk/services/cserv/edesk/** and choose Registration. Click on the **Register now** button next to **Database System**. You will be prompted to enter a password of your choice. Your username and password will be required whenever you connect to Interbase.

Manuals and further information about Interbase 6 can be found at: **www.york.ac.uk/services/cserv/ib6/ib6_information.htm**.

The UK Mirror Service

Joanne Casey

The UK Mirror Service is available at: **www.mirror.ac.uk/** and in text only version at: **www.mirror.ac.uk/index.textonly.html** offering access to a vast collection of freely available electronic resources.

Mirrors added recently include:

Apache XML Project
www.mirror.ac.uk/sites/xml.apache.org/
The Apache XML Project provides commercial-quality standards-based XML solutions that are developed in an open and cooperative fashion. The project provides feedback for standards bodies and is a focus for XML activities within Apache products.

Comparative Animal Brain Collections
www.mirror.ac.uk/sites/brainmuseum.org/
This web site provides users with images and information from one of the world's largest collection of well-preserved, sectioned and stained brains of mammals and a variety of related papers on brain science.

Computing in the Humanities Working Papers
www.mirror.ac.uk/sites/www.chass.utoronto.ca/epc/chwp/
CH Working Papers are an interdisciplinary series of refereed publications on computer-assisted research. Each article is accompanied by an abstract.

Samizdat Press
www.mirror.ac.uk/sites/samizdat.mines.edu/
Samizdat Press is devoted to the free distribution of books, lecture notes and software. This web site contains electronic copies of academic papers and publications from a variety of disciplines.

Usenet News Config Directory
www.mirror.ac.uk/sites/ftp.isc.org/usenet/CONFIG/
Of interest to those who are searching for relevant newsgroups, this site contains the master list of active Usenet groups, the master list of newsgroup descriptions, and the master list of who is allowed to modify a given newsgroup hierarchy.

For regular updates on newly added mirrors, join the UK Mirror Service mailing list, **mirror-users**, at **www.jiscmail.ac.uk**

Staff news
Mike Jinks

We welcome Phil Smailes as our new Software Technician and Tamsyn Quormby as a Computing Assistant.

Phil, the replacement for Dan Shelton on his appointment as Software Manager, has a background in Information Science and previously worked as a software tester for a library management systems supplier where he was also involved in the installation and configuration of software on client systems.

Tamsyn, the replacement for Paul Hodgson, comes to us from the City of York Council where she undertook several roles, particularly as a Library Assistant in the Central Library providing Internet training sessions and, subsequently, as an Information Assistant in the Yortime Resource Centre.

We also welcome Fergus McGlynn who is joining us on a two-year project in electronic student feedback as part of YIMS. Fergus has recently completed his degree in Computer Science at York after studying and working in Australia.

We hope all our new colleagues will enjoy their time with us.

Phil Smailes

Tamsyn Quormby

Fergus McGlynn

New Alcuin classroom
Brian Souter

The Computing Service has been responsible, on behalf of Health Studies, for installing the new Windows 2000 PC classroom in Alcuin East Wing. The room is equipped with 65 Pentium 4 PCs with 1.5GHz CPU, 256Mb memory and 100Mb zip drives. In addition to the PCs there is a fully equipped lecturers' lectern with video projection, sound and digital OHP. The facility is owned by Health Studies and their teaching needs take priority, but it may also be booked by other Departments. Contact the Timetabling Office (**www.york.ac.uk/admin/eto/book/**) for more information.

Licensed... to compute: ECDL

Debra Fayter

Many Keynotes readers will be in proud possession of a driving licence demonstrating their ability to perform hill starts, three point turns and other useful manoeuvres. Fewer will have a qualification that shows their skills at querying databases or performing calculations using spreadsheets, in other words a qualification that enables them to drive their computer. All that could be about to change!

Several universities are now providing the European Computer Driving Licence® (ECDL) to improve the skills of their staff (and sometimes students). See for example Oxford University's site at:
www.oucs.ox.ac.uk/ecdl.

I have been researching the qualification and its potential usefulness for York. This article will explain a little about the ECDL but please contact me if you would like to know more or have a view on it.

What is the European Computer Driving Licence?

The European Computer Driving Licence (ECDL) is the Europe-wide qualification which enables people to demonstrate their competence in computer skills. It is designed specifically for those who wish to gain a basic qualification in computing to help them with their current job, to develop their IT skills or to enhance their career prospects. No prior knowledge of IT or computer skills is needed to study for it.

The ECDL syllabus is designed to cover the key concepts of computing, its practical applications and their use in the workplace and society in general. It is broken down into seven modules, each of which must be passed before the ECDL certificate is awarded. Candidates obtain a logbook costing £25 and listing all the modules, usually from a test centre or from the British Computer Society. As they pass each module, the accredited testing body will sign the logbook. The modules may be taken in any order and over any period of time (up to three years). When all the modules have been successfully completed, the logbook is exchanged for a certificate. Students are not required to do any training. If they are already sufficiently experienced they can simply take the tests.

The seven modules that make up the ECDL are:

- Basic concepts of IT
- Using the computer and managing files
- Word processing
- Spreadsheets
- Database
- Presentation
- Information and Communication

Full details of the syllabus can be found at:
www.ecdl.com/syllabus/

The British Computer Society (BCS) manages and promotes the ECDL in the UK. Centres can provide training to prepare people for the ECDL but if they wish to become a test centre they need to be accredited by the BCS.

York and the ECDL

If it was felt appropriate to introduce the ECDL at York, the Computing Service could manage the ECDL in some of the following ways:

- become a fully accredited testing centre
- provide training specifically for the ECDL
- alter existing training courses so that they match the ECDL syllabus and refer people to other local centres for extra training / testing
- buy in course materials, ie CD-ROMs, for individuals to work through.

There are several considerations before taking the ECDL on board. Firstly, who would need it? The qualification is quite basic and may not meet the needs of more IT literate staff and students. However there are many staff whose skills could be enhanced by the ECDL. There are cost implications: £25 logbooks and the cost of training materials and testing. Yet, being able to work towards a qualification may raise interest in IT training and thereby improve an individual's work productivity.

These and other issues need to be considered further before a decision is made on the ECDL. Please contact me (**daf3**) if you have any views on the ECDL and its relevance or otherwise to York.

Iliad for University 2001
Sue Hodges

Iliad for University 2001 comprises four sessions: Computing at York, Researching and Evaluating Information Sources, Word Processing for Academic Purposes and Presenting Information Using a Computer. This year the workbooks have been written to Microsoft software, rather than Corel. As before the programme may be taken via two routes - taught course or self study. The taught course runs from weeks three to six of the Autumn Term.

Registration forms for Iliad for University were sent out to incoming students at the beginning of September - excluding Physics and Archaeology students, whose departments deliver the programme in house. Over 500 students responded before they arrived and many more signed up to take the programme during the second week of term.

The popular Iliad for Work course, Design of Web Pages has also run in the Autumn Term.

Further information about Iliad for Work courses in Spring Term 2002 may be found at:
www.york.ac.uk/services/cserv/iliad/forwork.htm

Classroom etiquette
Joanne Casey

Users of Computing Service classrooms or study areas are expected to follow the house rules:

- Library conditions are to be observed
- No eating, drinking or smoking
- Mobile phones should be switched off
- Users may not play games on the PCs
- Do not leave unattended PCs logged on: waiting users may log these off for their own use during busy times.

The computing facilities are provided for academic purposes: during busy periods casual users of the facilities should cede to waiting users.

Classrooms may be booked during teaching hours. The University Information Committee encourages teaching staff to admit students to use free machines, but they are not obliged to do so. If you are teaching, you may wish to consider ways in which you could admit drop-in students - perhaps keeping all the class members to the rows furthest from the doors, or excluding drop-in users until after any presentations. Students invited to work in a classroom while teaching is under way should respect that the class has priority and avoid causing any disruption.

Spring course schedule
John Illingworth

We were pleasantly surprised by the take-up for our courses this autumn, and as a result we will be repeating some of them in the spring term and maybe some more in the summer.

The most popular courses were part of the Web Strand, and we will be repeating **Web Pages without HTML** (week 1) and Web **Pages with HTML** (weeks 2, 3 & 4). We can't fit a repeat of **Style Sheets** in the spring term, so that one will have to wait until summer.

If HTML is the hors d'oeuvre, then the main course in the Web Strand is undoubtably **Cold Fusion**. This 6-week course assumes some knowledge of HTML, and, by way of excursions into SQL and database design, finishes with the Cold Fusion language which allows the construction of web pages that can exchange data with centrally-held databases. Many of the administrative web pages which allow you to book things, view specified items from the institutional databases are written in Cold Fusion; it has become a de facto standard in the University.

Spring is the time that we offer our specialist graphics courses; **Geographic Information Systems** for those with data having a spatial aspect, and **Open GL** for those wishing to write their own programs to display graphical images. You do need to be a C programmer for the latter.

Programming is something we have had to omit from the schedule this year, as our C++ specialist has left us, and we currently have no one with the correct combination of C++ and presentation skills. Perhaps we should be presenting a different development language? Delphi or Java perhaps? Another language possibility brings us back to the Web Strand; should we squeeze a Javascript course in there somewhere? Your opinions are valued; mail them to John Illingworth, **jji1@york.ac.uk**

The full course schedule can be found in the centre of this issue, and is also on the web at: **www.york.ac.uk/services/cserv/training/course.htm**. You may register for courses via the Information Desk (email: **infodesk**, tel: 3838) from 3 December.

Contacting the Computing Service

Computing Service
University of York
Heslington
YORK YO10 5DD

Telephone: (01904) 433800
Direct dial: (01904) 43 followed by ext no.
Fax: (01904) 433740
Email: *username*@york.ac.uk

www.york.ac.uk/services/cserv/

Information Desk

The Information Desk is your first point of contact with the Computing Service
Telephone: ext 3838
Email: *infodesk*
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 restoration, sales, course bookings and user registration. Printed output can be collected from the lobby entrance which is open from 8am to midnight.

Computing Service Staff

Director:	Mike Jinks	3801	*kmj1*
Departmental Secretary:	Lorraine Moor	3801	*lsm1*
Head of Infrastructure:	Robert Demaine	3808	*rld1*
Head of User Services:	John Illingworth	3803	*jji1*
Head of MIS:	Kay Mills-Hicks	2101	*kmh8*
Head of Technical Services:	Doug Moncur	3815	*dgm1*
Head of Systems:	Andrew Smith	3809	*abs4*
Operations Manager:	Brian Souter	3814	*bs1*
Head of Networking:	John Mason	3813	*jrm13*
Information Officer:	Joanne Casey	3805	*jmc8*

Linda Bailey	3800	*lcb6*
Sue Bolton	2102	*sjb28*
Mike Brudenell	3811	*pmb1*
Lisa Burkinshaw	3818	*ljb4*
John Byrne	3812	*jcb1*
David Chambers	3742	*dac6*
Michael Clark	3745	*mpc3*
Arthur Clune	3129	*ajc22*
Paul Conacher	4346	*pac1*
Steve Downes	3741	*sd21*
Debra Fayter	3839	*daf3*
Ken Finch	4452	*kf1*
Rob Fletcher	3816	*rpf1*
Kevin Gardner	3739	*pkg4*
Chris Gowland	3823	*cg1*
Sarah Hall	3827	*seh11*
Peter Halls	3806	*pjh1*
Sue Hodges	3839	*sh32*
Geoff Houlton	2100	*gph2*

Jenny Jackson	4455	*jj5*
Chris Kilgour	4454	*crhk1*
Fergus McGlynn	3805	*fam6*
John Marsden	3832	*jpm1*
Darren Munday	3821	*dam6*
Nicola Normandale	4695	*ncn1*
Phil O'Connell	3825	*paoc1*
Aimee Phillips	3897	*amp11*
Tamsyn Quormby	4347	*tq1*
Colin Rea	3817	*cr9*
Peter Roberts	3802	*pdr1*
Sam Scott	3817	*svs2*
Daniel Shelton	4349	*ds23*
Philip Smailes	3833	*pjrs1*
Simon Thompson	3894	*sjt8*
Pete Turnbull	3804	*pnt1*
Sam Vines	3749	*sccv1*
Timothy Willson	2123	*ftmw1*