

Keynotes

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From the Editor

The Agresso finance system rolled smoothly into action on 12 January, after a lot of hard work by the YIMS team. On page 3, Nicola Normandale gives an update on its operation, and sources of training and help.



As some systems blossom in Spring, others fade away in Autumn. The supported Windows 95 service will end on 1 October. Mike Jinks gives more detail on page 2.



Laptop PCs continue to increase in popularity among our users, with many now choosing them instead of, rather than in addition to, a desktop machine. Turn to page 2 if you are considering purchasing a laptop to use on a supported connection.



Our cover photo shows the new PC room in the JB Morrell Library. Turn to page 2 for more details of this facility.

Joanne Casey

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Keynotes on the web

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

Information Strategy

Mike Jinks

The University's Information Strategy underpins many of the critical activities of the University eg the Research Strategy, and the Teaching and Learning Strategy. Information Committee is reviewing the current Information Strategy to reflect both general changes, eg increased regulatory compliance issues and increased collaborative activities, and specific developments planned at York eg the new Heslington East campus. The Committee will consider the revised version of the strategy later this term and will seek comments from departments and other interested parties before approving the final version.

The computing requirements of the University will continue to develop and will become increasingly critical: if the University is to continue to prosper, its IT facilities need to be at least as good as its competitors'. The strategy will outline the major issues that the University is likely to need to address, but it is important that, as far as is possible, the ambitions of departments are supported by the proposed infrastructural and other developments, so comments will be very welcome.

New staff courses

Susanne Hodges

Rob Fletcher, Computing Service graphics' expert, has developed a new two-part staff training course, Creating Graphics Using Paint Shop Pro. This networked application is a graphics and photo editor that allows you to quickly create graphics for posters, fliers, presentations and the Web. You can use built-in preset shapes or produce your own original art work. You can also edit, enhance and repair photographs with easy to use tools. The course will be piloted during the Easter Vacation on 23 and 24 March.

Another new course, Introduction to SPSS, takes place on April 6, given by Jeremy Miles, Lecturer in Biostatistics in the Department of Health Studies. SPSS is a statistics package, with some similarities to database and spreadsheet packages. This course will introduce data entry, simple data manipulation and analysis in SPSS. No prior knowledge of SPSS or statistics will be assumed.

Full details can be found in the course schedule included with this issue of Keynotes. We expect both courses to be popular, so book early to avoid disappointment; contact the Information Desk (infodesk@york.ac.uk) to book your place.

User satisfaction survey

Joanne Casey

The Computing Service is to carry out a user satisfaction survey from 1 - 17 March, using the Online Feedback System. Participants, selected by sampling, will be invited by email to complete the survey, and will have the chance to win £25. The survey will run concurrently with the Library's user satisfaction survey, sampling a different set of users. The results will enable us to see how our services are perceived by users, and will inform future developments. If you're selected to participate, please take the time to complete the survey - your views matter!

SNS developments

Robert Demaine and Matt Holmes

Following on from this year's successful expansion of the Student Network Service (SNS), the Computing Service is now looking at the feasibility of connecting the remaining areas of campus college accommodation. All of Goodricke College, Vanbrugh College, and Langwith/Derwent Colleges A-D blocks are being subjected to detailed survey. Pending the outcome of the feasibility study, a further 1000 study bedrooms would be added to the current count of around 2500 which we would hope to have connected for the start of the next academic year.

Staff news

Mike Jinks

We're pleased to welcome David Broom who has joined us as a Technical Support Assistant within the Information Systems Group where he will be supporting the YIMS systems. David joins us from Tunstall Group where he held a variety of posts culminating in that of Technical Support Engineer in which he provided second and third line support to their busy helpdesk as well as direct support to customers. We wish him well in his new role with us.



Easter and May bank holidays

Brian Souter

The Computing Service building and Information Desk will be closed on each of the four bank holidays in April and May: Good Friday (9 April), Easter Monday (12 April), May Day (3 May), and the Spring Bank Holiday (31 May). All services will be available as usual outside normal hours; no staff will be on duty to attend to faults, and access to the PC rooms will be subject to college opening hours.

'...assuming that it takes a person one second to delete a message it will take humanity a combined 222 years to process just a day's worth of spam.'

Source: Trudeau, Cullen and Zwieback, 'Major Techniques for Classifying Spam', White Paper published by SurfControl, 2003.

Supported laptops

Robert Demaine and Steve Downes

Over the past year we have seen an increasing demand from users wishing to convert laptop PCs into supported devices capable of connection to the campus network and with access to the same range of services as a static desktop system. In most cases this has worked well, and there are now many satisfied customers happily using such systems. This is the good news.

The bad news is that the popularity of such a solution has led more people to buy an ever-expanding range of products from within the University's framework purchasing agreement to use in this way. Given the highly proprietary and constantly evolving nature of hardware and drivers in the laptop world we are finding that the time taken to configure a wide range of subtly different models is eating into precious staff resources. Lest it be forgotten, there are currently just three Computing Service technicians to provide front-line support to 3,000 desktops.

As a result we plan to focus what resource we do have available into a subset of devices of which we have experience and which are known to work. In all cases the operating system should be Windows XP Pro, and the hardware should be either Toshiba or Sony Vaio. For any other makes or models *caveat emptor* applies, and we may be unable to help with converting these into supported devices.

Withdrawal of Windows 95 supported connections

Mike Jinks

Following a survey of departmental plans last year and subsequent discussions, the supported Windows 95 service will cease at 5pm on Friday 1 October 2004.

The Windows 95 operating system has been unsupported by Microsoft, including provision of security fixes, for some two years, and our Windows 2000 service will have been in operation for three years, by the time the Windows 95 service is discontinued, allowing a considerable overlap period for people to move to the later system. All the centrally managed classrooms and 24-hour study centres have operated under Windows 2000 since the start of the current academic year, and most staff office systems already run under Windows 2000 with many more scheduled to do so over the summer when new PCs are purchased.

Any PCs currently running under the supported Windows 95 service which you wish to continue to use will need to convert to Windows 2000 if the hardware is able to run the operating system or will need to be rebuilt as stand-alone, unsupported Windows 95 systems.

New PC room in the Library

Brian Souter

A new PC room opened in the Library on Monday 1 March, equipped with 25 Pentium 4 PCs with 2.4GHz CPU, 512Mb memory, 250Mb zip drives and 15" flat screens. A standard Computing Service classroom printer will be installed later in the year.

The new facility is situated on the ground floor of the main JB Morrell Library in room R/002, opposite the Audiovisual Room, and is available to all members of the University subject to Library opening times. It is essentially a study area but is equipped with projection equipment and also subject to occasional bookings.

The Computing Service now has a total of 43 classroom PCs in the Library in three locations: 14 PCs on the first floor in area R/113; 25 PCs on the ground floor in room R/002; 4 PCs in the Main Reading Room of the Raymond Burton Library. Any faults with these PCs should be reported to the Computing Service Information Desk on extension 3838 or by e-mailing infodesk@york.ac.uk.

Agresso finance system update

Nicola Normandale

The Agresso finance system was launched on 12 January. With a more user-friendly interface than MAC, it offers many new features and provides the basis for developing and enhancing all University financial information systems in the next few years.

The introduction of Agresso has also provided the opportunity to fundamentally change the University's accounting structure, and its flexibility means that future structural changes will be relatively easy to accomplish.

Finance data

All transactions for accounting year 2003/04 have been transferred to Agresso, and for 2002/03, summarised transactions have been brought over for all project and nominal accounts which were still open on 31 July 2003. At the time of going to press, it is planned to bring over all transactions prior to 2003/04 for all open projects.

Supplier and customer data held on MAC was rationalised and cleaned up, with the removal of obsolete data, and then transferred to Agresso. A similar process was carried out to transfer 'materials' on MAC to 'products' in Agresso. Those needing to enquire on non-project transaction detail prior to 2003/04 can still do this via MAC or the Data Warehouse.

How do I get help and support for Agresso?

The YIMS Online Support Centre (see October Keynotes) at www.york.ac.uk/univ/mis/cfm/supportcentre/support_main.cfm is the main source of help and support information for users of Agresso, providing FAQs, code lists, training information and problem reporting facilities. The link can be found on the Staff Interactive YorkWeb page.

System availability

The Agresso system is available to authorised users throughout the week, including weekends. Back-ups are taken every weekday night between 10pm and 3am. During the back-up the system is unavailable.

To allow for system maintenance and testing, there will be a weekly "at risk" period on Tuesday mornings when the system may be unavailable until 10:00. If the system is to be unavailable, this will be advertised on the York Extra announcements channel, the DCO mailing list, the YIMS support centre and on the Agresso web screen.

Major upgrades will be scheduled and advertised several weeks in advance, and users will be kept informed about system availability.

Training

Copies of all training materials are available for download from the YIMS support centre. Finance is aiming to schedule more training courses in the future and further information will be made available on the YIMS Support Centre. Please note that as these courses are not administered or delivered by the Computing Service they will not appear in Computing Service training information.

Reporting problems

A form is available from the 'Report a problem or query' link on the YIMS support centre to report any problems with Agresso that cannot be resolved from the information supplied on the support centre. Completion of the form creates an entry in the Enquiry Tracking System which is sent directly to the Finance Office support team.

Future plans

Detailed plans are now being drawn up. We will need to schedule an upgrade to the next version of Agresso and new modules will be introduced for various aspects handled by the Finance department including bank reconciliation and European fixed assets. Purchase order processing will also be rolled out on a phased basis to all those departments that are not already on the Agresso electronic ordering system.

Dispute resolution

Mike Brudenell

From time to time people have contacted the Computing Service asking us to ascertain whether Person X did indeed send any email to Person Y as they are claiming, but which Person Y says they never received.

Often such enquiries have centred around messages sent to or from external mail service providers - eg, Hotmail. To date every enquiry about a message sent to such services that has gone “missing” has shown it being successfully transmitted from the University’s mail servers and accepted by the target system; any problem of non-delivery therefore has lain with the external service provider. Consequently the Computing Service **does not recommend** the use of such external mail services for sending or receiving important University work.

The mail servers are indeed set up to log every message passing through them, and these logfiles are retained for a period of time. However these are principally for identifying problems with the mail service itself, and to enable us to provide supporting evidence should a complaint be made about libellous or abusive messages.

As use of email continues to grow it is becoming increasingly time-consuming to glean evidence from the logfiles and is no longer something we can enter into doing lightly. Whilst serious incidents will of course still be investigated, we will no longer be investigating more minor incidents.

Departments inviting students to submit coursework by email should bear this in mind: the Computing Service will be unable to assist in resolving, for example, a dispute with a student claiming to have sent in coursework, but which the department believes has not arrived. Instead, fail-safe procedures should be included when planning any such system, such as requiring the member of staff receiving coursework by email to acknowledge each submission. Students should be informed about this procedure and to enquire further if they do not receive back such a “receipt”.

Finally, please note that if you need to report a serious incident about email to the Computing Service you should do so as promptly as possible: we keep the mail server logfiles for some weeks, but are unable to go back many months. It is also important to provide us with as much detail as possible about the messages involved - date/time, sender, recipient(s), etc; our servers now handle over 60,000 messages per day and such information is invaluable in tracking down relevant log entries.

Mailbox management

Mike Brudenell

You may remember that a few months ago we converted people’s Inbox folders into a new and more efficient storage format. As hoped, this has indeed increased the performance of the mail servers, with opening the folder and viewing messages now being rather “snappier”.

However, it is still important, for your own sake and that of others, to manage your mail folders sensibly. In particular this means keeping the size of, and number of messages in, any given folder to sensible limits. When a folder has many messages in it or is large (perhaps by containing messages with attachments) it becomes slower to open and manipulate its messages. You should therefore check through your mail folders periodically and perform “housekeeping” on them:

Delete messages you no longer need

Mark any messages you no longer need for deletion; then remember to purge/expunge the folder having done so. Pay particular attention to those with attachments, which can easily make a message very large in size.

Delete attachments from messages

If you have a message you wish to keep but it has an attachment: save the attachment to your filestore and then delete the attachment from the message. (Whether and how you do this depends on the mail client you are using; Outlook certainly provides this ability.)

Keep your folders trim’n’slim!

If a folder is building up a lot of messages in it consider re-filing some of them into other folders. This is particularly important if you regularly open the folder.

Clean out your “sent mail” folder

Remember to check any folder you save copies of sent messages in. If forgotten about, this folder can eventually become very large, using up a lot of your storage space on the mail server and becoming very inefficient and slow to access.

Contacting the Computing Service

Computing Service	Telephone:	(01904)433800
University of York	Direct dial:	(01904) 43 followed by ext no.
Heslington	Fax:	(01904)433740
YORK YO10 5DD	Email:	<i>username@york.ac.uk</i>

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 during opening hours.

Computing Service Staff

Director:	Mike Jinks	3801	<i>knj1</i>
Departmental Secretary:	Lorraine Moor	3801	<i>lsm1</i>
Head of Infrastructure:	Robert Demaine	3808	<i>rld1</i>
Head of Information Systems:	Kay Mills-Hicks	2101	<i>knh8</i>
Head of Support Services:	David Surtees	3803	<i>dps4</i>
Operations Manager:	Brian Souter	3814	<i>bs1</i>
Information Officer:	Joanne Casey	3805	<i>jmc8</i>

Kashif Amin	3817	<i>ka14</i>	Jenny Jackson	4455	<i>jj5</i>
Gavin Atkinson	3738	<i>ga9</i>	Chris Kilgour	4454	<i>crhk1</i>
Linda Bailey	3800	<i>lcb6</i>	Fergus McGlynn	3822	<i>fam6</i>
Sue Bolton	2102	<i>sjb28</i>	John Marsden	3832	<i>jpm1</i>
David Broom	3229	<i>dlb10</i>	John Mason	3813	<i>jrm13</i>
Mike Brudenell	3811	<i>pmb1</i>	Darren Miller	3815	<i>dm26</i>
John Byrne	3812	<i>jcb1</i>	Darren Munday	3821	<i>dam6</i>
David Chambers	3742	<i>dac6</i>	Colin Noble	1747	<i>cdn1</i>
Michael Clark	3745	<i>mpc3</i>	Nicola Normandale	4695	<i>ncn1</i>
Arthur Clune	3129	<i>ajc22</i>	Phil O'Connell	3825	<i>paoc1</i>
Steve Downes	3741	<i>sd21</i>	Suran Perera	4689	<i>sjp25</i>
Ken Finch	4452	<i>kf1</i>	Aimee Phillips	3897	<i>amp11</i>
Rob Fletcher	3816	<i>rpfl</i>	Chris Reece	3807	<i>car7</i>
Kevin Gardner	3739	<i>pkg4</i>	Sam Scott	3817	<i>svs2</i>
Chris Gowland	3823	<i>cg1</i>	Daniel Shelton	4349	<i>ds23</i>
Dan Granville	3839	<i>dsg2</i>	Philip Smailes	3833	<i>pjrs1</i>
Sarah Hall	3827	<i>seh11</i>	Andrew Smith	3809	<i>abs4</i>
Peter Halls	3806	<i>pjh1</i>	Ben Thompson	3230	<i>bt4</i>
John Hawes	4347	<i>jeh11</i>	Pete Turnbull	3804	<i>pnt1</i>
Susanne Hodges	3839	<i>sh32</i>	Sam Vines	3749	<i>sccv1</i>
Matt Holmes	3820	<i>mjh25</i>	Jonathan Wheeler	3818	<i>jdw5</i>
Geoff Houlton	2100	<i>gph2</i>	Timothy Willson	2123	<i>ftmw1</i>
John Hutchinson	3898	<i>jh57</i>			

Keynotes

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