Key notes

Too much information?

Using Business Objects to make sense of it all

From the Editor

As part of the YIMS programme, the reporting tool, Business Objects, has been introduced to the University. You can find more information about using this versatile tool on page 4.

✤

After many years in the Computing Service, Tim Willson is moving to a new post in Finance. On page 6, he reflects on his time at the University so far.

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As well as running an Access course in the Christmas vacation (see page 2), we have a full programme of training arranged for the Spring term. Turn to the centre of Keynotes to see the course schedule.

Joanne Casey

Contents

Keynotes on the web

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

Keynotes

Further improvement to the Sophos Anti-Virus service
John Hutchinson

In October's Keynotes I mentioned the potentially distracting effect of Sophos's standard update arrangements (which incorporate detection for newly discovered viruses). Changes to the deployment of the Sophos Anti-Virus software mean that the regular updates now take place on supported connection PCs without the Sophos splash window appearing on users' screens and temporarily taking focus from the currently active window. This development will be a particular advantage to teaching staff who have sometimes found the screen to be a distraction during presentations.

Users can be assured that the absence of the Sophos window does not mean that updates are being neglected: normal daily updates will continue as before, as will the practice of monitoring supported connection PCs to ensure that Sophos is running correctly.

For more information on Sophos, please see: **www.york.ac.uk/go/sophos/**.

Staff news
Mike Jinks

We're sorry to say farewell to two members of staff leaving us this term.

Dave Chambers left us at the end of October to develop his career with a company specialising in veterinary imaging equipments. Dave joined us in May 1999 as a Computing Assistant where he joined the team on the Information Desk. He transferred to being a Technician some two years later and has been a welcome sight to many on campus who have been grappling with problems with their PCs. Before joining us, Dave had worked as a Radiographer in the Army but wished to develop his IT skills. These two areas have come together to provide him with an ideal opportunity to develop his career and we wish him all the best in his new job.

We also say a partial farewell to Tim Willson. Tim has had a long-standing association with the University, starting as a student. He later returned to work for the Students' Union, as Finance Officer before moving to work within the University's Finance Office, initially in the Fees Office and subsequently in the Data Processing Unit within the Finance Office. Tim joined the Computing Service in 1995 with the merger of the Data Processing Office with the Computing Service.

Tim has been involved in the major changes in the University's business systems, culminating in the YIMS programme. He has maintained his involvement with Finance systems but has also become involved in a wide variety of other activities, where his enthusiasm and commitment have aided the implementation and exploitation of the new systems, as well as helping people get the best from the existing systems.

Tim is now returning to the Finance Office as their Business Systems Development Manager where he will continue to be involved with the Computing Service as well as other departments throughout the University in identifying potential developments and helping people make most effective use of the financial systems. We wish him well in his new role.

Christmas holidays
Brian Souter

The Computing Service building will be closed over the Christmas holiday period from 12.30 on Friday 24 December until 09.00 on Tuesday 4 January. All services will be available as usual outside normal hours but access to the PC rooms will be subject to college opening hours. The Information Desk will be closed throughout this period and no staff will be on duty to attend to any faults.

SNS uptake – facts and figures
Robert Demaine

The start of this academic year has witnessed a massive growth in the number of students subscribing to the Student Network Service (SNS). This follows completion during the summer of the final phase of rollout to cover all study bedrooms on campus.

At the time of writing (start of week 5) overall SNS takeup has reached 67% with some 2,353 active registrations. In terms of colleges, Derwent has the highest percentage takeup rate at 79%, closely followed by Langwith and Halifax. The highest number of registrations is to be found in Halifax with 540. Windows XP is by some distance the operating system of choice, accounting for 85% of all client connections. The most popular non-Microsoft operating system is MacOS X with just 2.7% of connections.

Content management system and portal software
Kriss Fearon

The University is currently undertaking research into the benefits of acquiring software which will improve the function, use and appearance of YorkWeb. Your views on the specification would be much appreciated, as this will ensure that the needs of web authors and users of YorkWeb are fully taken into account.

For further information and links to the document itself, see: **www.york.ac.uk/coord/cmsportal/**.

Keynotes

Webmail service updated
Mike Brudenell

On Monday 15 November the University's Webmail Service was updated with a number of improvements.

Increased resilience

To date the Webmail Service has been run on a single computer. This is being expanded to two, meaning that the service should continue to be available in the event of scheduled (or unscheduled) downtime on one of the pair.

Minor bug fixes

A new version of the Prayer webmail server software is being installed. This has no new functionality but does include a couple of very minor bug-fixes.

Revamped appearance

*   The rather pedestrian icons of the old service have been replaced.
*   A new colour theme - YorkMail Standard - has been added, which is now the default for new users of the service.
*   The names of some of the toolbar icons have been changed to distinguish them a little more clearly:

    *   **Mailbox** becomes **Folder**
    *   **Folders** becomes **Home**
    *   **Manage** becomes **Options**

As usual, the Webmail Service can be found at: **https://webmail.york.ac.uk/**
(Note the **https** prefix, signifying the use of a secure HTTP connection. This protects your information from being seen whilst in transit, no matter where you are in the world when accessing the service.)

Colour printing
Joanne Casey

As announced in the October issue of Keynotes, we are currently trialling colour printing with a new HP Colour Laser Jet 5500 hdn (located in the Computing Service building), which produces high-quality print out, at a cost to users of 30p per A4 sheet. The service is available to all, but is primarily used by students, who are less likely to have access to Departmental colour printers. The service has been advertised not only through Keynotes, but also via this year's Computing Service User Guides, classroom posters, the Departmental Computing Officers' mailing list, and YorkExtra.

The trial of colour printing will run until Christmas this year; if there is sufficient use of the service, the printer will be relocated to G/022. The printer also has A3 capability, which would be enabled at this stage.

If there is insufficient use to make the service financially viable, it will be withdrawn, and the Computing Service will no longer provide a central colour printing facility.

SSH on Unix
Arthur Clune

The Computing Service advocates the use of ssh in place of tools like rsh, rlogin, telnet and ftp.

For some time, we have been using ssh.com's version of ssh. Since they are now stopping developement of their free version, we will be moving to the version of ssh from OpenSSH as from the beginning of the Spring Term.

The main user-visible effects of this will be that some of the more advanced commmand line options to ssh, sftp and scp change slightly, and any users who have set up public-key authentication will need to convert their keys to a new format.

Full details of how to do this will be published on: **www.york.ac.uk/services/cserv/security/** .

Staff training courses
Susanne Hodges

An Access course will run during the Christmas vacation on 20, 21 and 22 December from 1.15-3.15 in D/114. Please contact Computing Service Infodesk on extension 3838 or **infodesk@york.ac.uk** if you would like to register.

Spring term courses are open for registration on 1 December. For a complete timetable of the 2004/5 course schedule, visit: **www.york.ac.uk/services/cserv/training/timetable.htm**

SITS Admissions goes live
Jenny Smailes

The SITS Admissions System went fully live at the start of October. This virtually completes the move over from the MAC Student Records System. The method of communicating with UCAS for the electronic exchange of applicant records has seen a fundamental change. UCAS have been developing a new system known as Hercules to replace the ftp file transfer used previously. The University is one of the first in the country to implement a Hercules link. SITS manages applications via all three admissions entry systems, UCAS, NMAS and GTTR plus applications to HYMS. It is hoped that additional applicant information will be made available by UCAS via Hercules e.g. statements and references.

The implementation of SITS Admissions has included creating an admissions section in the Data Warehouse, improved letter writing facilities, statistical reporting and an Admissions Enquiry Screen. Further information is available via the Online Support Centre: **www.york.ac.uk/univ/mis/cfm/ supportcentre/support_main.cfm**.

Prospective students
Joanne Casey

Those of you who are involved in student recruitment will be pleased to learn that the Computing Service web pages now include information targetted specifically at prospective students.

The information, which can be found at **www.york.ac.uk/services/ cserv/prospective.html**, aims to answer all the questions that students, and their parents, ask at Open Day, and includes information on the Student Network Service, central computing facilities, training and support, security provision and accessibility issues.

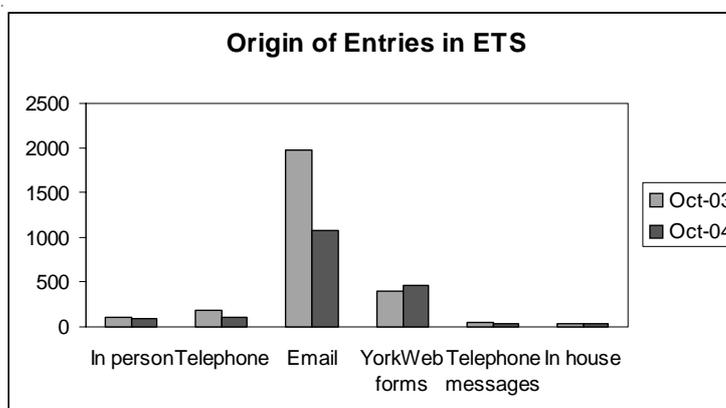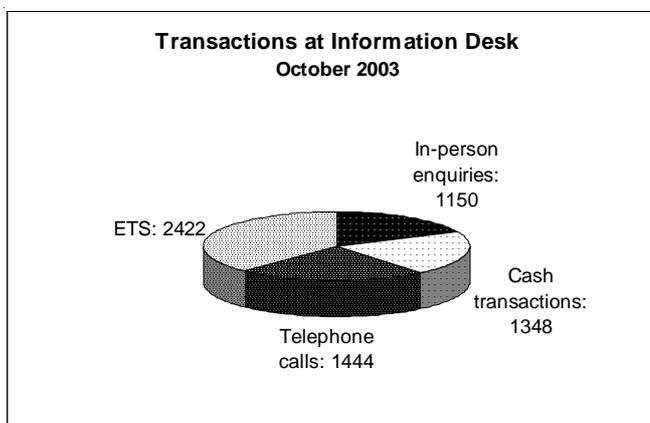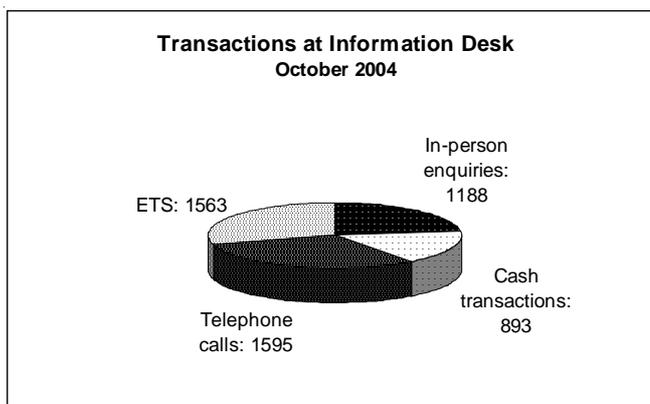The page is linked from the Computing Service home page, and from the University's online prospectuses.

October on the Information Desk
Joanne Casey

The Information Desk staff had another busy start to the Autumn term. However, their workload in terms of cash transactions was reduced compared to the same period last year, as payments for the Student Network Service are now taken at the Finance Office.

Nevertheless, staff were fully occupied answering queries on SNS and a wide range of other topics in person, on the phone, and via the Enquiry Tracking System (ETS).

With regard to ETS, we are pleased to note an increase in the use of YorkWeb forms to enter information: this helps ensure that we have all the relevant information from the beginning, increasing the likelihood of a swift resolution to a query.

Transactions at Information Desk
October 2004

- In-person enquiries: 1188
- Cash transactions: 893
- Telephone calls: 1595
- ETS: 1563

Transactions at Information Desk
October 2003

- In-person enquiries: 1150
- Cash transactions: 1348
- Telephone calls: 1444
- ETS: 2422

Origin of Entries in ETS

Legend: Oct-03, Oct-04

Categories: In person, Telephone, Email, YorkWeb forms, Telephone messages, In house

Keynotes

Business Objects reporting
F T M Willson

As you may be aware from previous articles the University decided last year to introduce a Reporting Tool, Business Objects, as a part of the YIMS programme. This tool is now in use over a variety of applications, either fully launched or in test mode, and this is an opportunity to bring readers up to speed about the tool and its use.

The Business Objects Suite consists of five different modules – two web based (WebIntelligence Reporter and InfoView) and three based on client/server architecture (Supervisor, Designer and Business Objects – which rather confusingly is the name for the full client reporting tool, as well as the overall suite and the company).
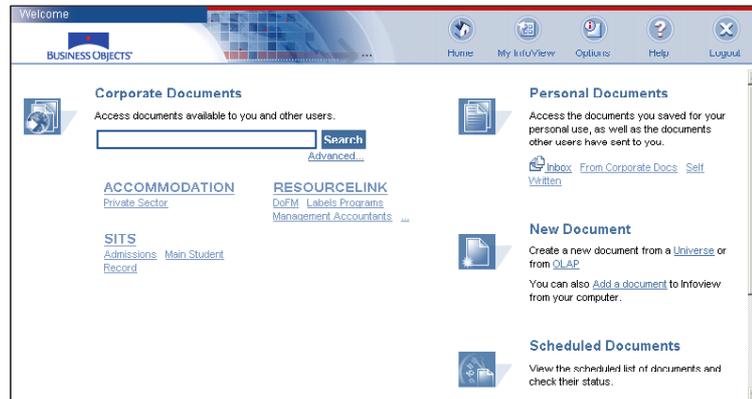
All access to Business Objects is subject to individual licences. The university has, in the first instance, purchased 150 web licences (WebIntelligence Reporter and InfoView), a small number of full client Business Objects and Designer and a couple of Supervisor licences for use within the Computing Service This is a best-of-breed business reporting tool so these licences (even with educational discount) have cost a significant sum! To be able to access pre-written reports or to write reports of their own users have to have one of these licences individually allocated to them (shared account use or sharing a single login between users is not possible).

Supervisor is the overarching control tool within which user accounts are set up, groups of users are allocated to appropriate sections of the application and report access is set. Access to Supervisor is therefore managed within the Computing Service. It should be noted that one "feature" of Business Objects is that if a user fails to login correctly three times in a row their login is disabled; this has to be reset within Supervisor. If this happens to you, please contact the InfoDesk who will forward your request to the appropriate section.

Designer is the next module – this is the semantic layer in which tables (and the fields within them) from the underlying database are represented in a form understandable to the report writer and the joins between tables and the routes by which table joins should be followed (called contexts) are created. This output is called a "Universe"; so users of Designers are "universe creators"!

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Universes are published to the Business Objects Server on the network. Once this is done WebIntelligence Reporters are able to write reports against them. Reports can be saved as personal documents by report writers or published to "Corporate Documents" – where authorised users of InfoView are able to run reports, responding to prompts etc and then print, mail within the Business Objects environment to a fellow member of their Business Objects user group or save the report in either Portable Document Format (pdf) or as an Excel spreadsheet.

Business Objects is being used in "live" mode for reporting over the Kronos Time and Attendance system, legacy data for the MAC postgraduate admissions statistics, SITS postgraduate and undergraduate admissions statistics, SITS main student record, the Aleph library system and the PAMS accommodation module. Under development are four universes to allow reporting from the HR/Payroll application; ResourceLink.

Business Objects is proving to be a versatile tool and there are already several hundred pre-written reports for users to run and those users with WebIntelligence Reporter licences are already creating personal reports, mailing these to colleagues in the same universe groups for local running and, where authorised, publishing report templates to Corporate Documents for general use.
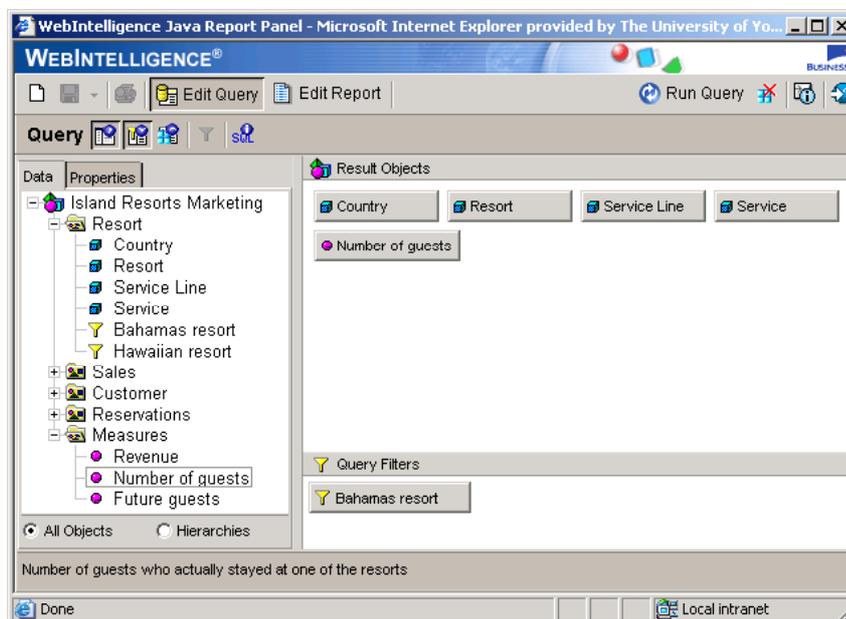
With ResourceLink it is intended to roll out carefully selected elements of enquiry over personnel reporting to departments and centres within the next couple of years alongside the intense use already in place of the test versions of the P&P universes in Planning, Payroll, Personnel, Finance Management Accounts Offices and within the Directorate of DoFM. This leaves a rump of licences for use with the new DoFM Works and Hospitality Management systems.

A further development might be to have a universe over the new Oracle Data Warehouse – this would allow links from several YIMS (or other) databases or transfer of data from them into one place and permit reporting across application boundaries (for example reporting from both Agresso Finance and ResourceLink Personnel areas to help accurate completion of Staff HESA returns).

Once a user has a licence allocated to them it is possible to extend that licence to access as many universes as are authorised by the database owners but at the level of the existing licence (e.g. InfoView). This means that although we are currently limited to 150 user licences the number of "universe users" can far exceed this number. We already have several users within the administration with access to five or six universes.

This is clearly an area ripe for exploitation, although we are already aware of the constraints imposed by such a limited number of licences. However, if a sound financial business case can be made for licence funding it may be possible to extend Business Objects to many other areas. If you wish to explore this please feel free to contact Geoff Houlton, Development Manager, **gph2@york.ac.uk** or extension 2100.

Look back in ~~anger~~ amusement
Timothy Willson reflects on his career to date...

So long, farewell, auf wiedersehen, goodbye – some people think that I have been in the Computing Service since this was a No 1 hit – I assure you it must have been a re-release! (Although I suspect there will be the "Sound of Music" as I leave)

However, I do admit I have been around the University for a while - initially as a student in the early 70's, then as a member of staff in the Students' Union, the Billing Office and the Management Information Systems Office; then a part of the Finance Department. Those were good days (I have to say that as I'm off back to Finance soon and my new - actually the same old - boss!) Latterly, of course, in the Computing Service.

"we were office automated with a Wordplex machine the size of a small car"

When I first joined the Finance Department all accounts were manually typed and at the end of every month we had to balance the books. This involved hours of listing out the balances from the books full of flimsy copies of the invoices, checking them back, recalculating manually amended outstanding balances, until the error was discovered. Usually I was the culprit taking 9p from £1 and balancing it to 90p! (Yes, really we once spent a week finding this – and people wish they were back in the "good old days"). We were "office automated" then with a Wordplex machine the size of a small car which churned out a few reminder letters after about four hours of coaxing from a skilled clerical operator – certainly not the secretary-less world of "I'll do my own minutes" so many of us inhabit now.

I moved to MIS and we introduced the DIBOL Finance System. This was in the teeth of opposition from the departments who liked the in-house written system that had been crafted "just how we need it" and despite the fact that it was nigh on impossible to extract much more than the balance of accounts from it. It certainly didn't provide the management information we all expect now. We succeeded, people grumbled but it worked, we got reports out and the accounts were more easily created at the end of the year.

Then came the MAC System. Suddenly DIBOL was a wonderful system, just what we needed and why did we have to change? We implemented, over a few years, Student Records, Payroll and Personnel, Estates, Research and Finance Manager Modules. We weren't overly good at reporting initially (PIs gaily spent away for 3 months before there was output and the Lab Supers were able to go and ask them what they thought they were doing!) but slowly we got there. I spent inordinate amounts of time at user group meetings in Crick with the software developers - variously named Coulson, Heron Associates, CHA, SBS and finally Ramesys; but luckily always the same folk doing the same job - tuning the systems so they delivered what was needed by the end users.

We moved on, a Data Warehouse was introduced – initially based on files users had to download onto their PC's every morning and latterly to the database version. I was forever getting into trouble early on with the much missed Peter Burgess in Computer Science – CS, never people to follow the same procedure as everybody else, decided to automate the process by running a key-recording program and playing it back at 2.00 in the morning. Unfortunately this was a system under development and it was me who kept on adding extra lines; thus sending

the key playback totally out of kilter. Many was the morning that Peter had the opening prices for the Tokyo Stock Exchange instead of the drab Computer Science accounts balances. (Probably looked quite good in Yen until he realised!) But I digress as those who know me realise I always do. We eventually got the MAC System to a level where users were happy(ish), chuntered at every opportunity (or, as my learned colleague just said "brought to your attention the deficiencies of the system"), were vaguely content but always wanted more. We introduced ColdFusion web applications and users got used to ordering stationery on line, requisitioning Biology Stores and checking research grant announcements. Software was now at the core of all the administrative work undertaken in the university.

And then we got YIMS. Suddenly, yes you've guessed it, MAC was the ideal software system, perfect in every way and why did we have to change it? Déjà vu or what? Perhaps I'm getting too long in the tooth for this?

But three years later we have SITS for Student Records and Admissions, Kronos for Time and Attendance, Planon and Kinetics on their way for DoFM , Business Objects for Reporting and Agresso for Finance. No software package is ever perfect but they all have the potential to deliver far more for the university and, anyway, where would we be without something to complain about, blame for all our ills but deliver good reliable data and be something to keep me in gainful employment for the next few years?

"Times change but everything stays the same...."

In the middle of all this we were "merged" with the Computing Service, Trevor Bolton of fond memory left for sunnier shores, a friendly Kay Mills-Hicks took over, we are now called "The Information Systems Group" and I work in the Business Systems Group Development Team. Times change but everything stays the same….

So what other nuggets of reminiscences are there? Too many, too painful or too contentious to list but here's one more.

Merger was a somewhat controversial move – Computing Service didn't want us and we didn't want to come. Mind you at one stage I was going to be "left behind" in Finance (would have saved all these office moves I suppose) but following PVC intervention we came as one and, despite concerns that the Computing Service was going to become the MIS Service, we have collectively survived and learned to live in what passes for harmony. Very early on, even before we had physically moved here, I was persuaded to stand for election as the Chair of the Computing Service Board – I had not attended a single meeting, knew noone in the existing service but it seemed that it would signal the intention of MIS to play a full part in the department. Anyway, I turned up, to a sea of unfamiliar faces, raised my head above the parapet and waited. I expected to be shot down in flames and was so relieved when John Illingworth suggested that the ballot result should be announced only as "who had won" rather than the vote count; less humiliation for me I felt. I thought I'd get my own vote and that of the guy who'd got me to stand and that would be it. The mad fools (now of course my esteemed colleagues) elected me!! They clearly hadn't listened to the babble from Heslington Hall. All too soon they discovered what they had done but by then it was too late.

Did we integrate? Possibly, though BSG still has its own kettle, corridor and ways of working, but now if anything goes wrong they blame the Computing Service not MIS so perhaps we have.

And no, despite this valedictory address I'm not retiring, far from it, I'm going to the Finance Department as the new Business Systems Development Manager (BSDM – no not BDSM - that's something about bondage that I think best not mentioned here). I'm there to help get the best out of the Agresso System, introduce other software as needed and to liaise with the Computing Service and other I.T professionals about the interaction of YIMS and other systems.

Sorry, but you haven't heard the last of me yet...

Keynotes

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: *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.

Computing Service Staff

Director:	Mike Jinks	3801	*kmj1*
Departmental Secretary:	Lorraine Moor	3801	*lsm1*
Head of Infrastructure:	Robert Demaine	3808	*rld1*
Head of Information Systems:	Kay Mills-Hicks	2101	*kmh8*
Head of Support Services:	David Surtees	3803	*dps4*
Operations Manager:	Brian Souter	3814	*bs1*
Information Officer:	Joanne Casey	3805	*jmc8*

Kashif Amin	3817	*ka14*	Fergus McGlynn	3822	*fam6*
Gavin Atkinson	3738	*ga9*	John Marsden	3832	*jpm1*
Amanda Bacon	3802	*agb12*	John Mason	3813	*jrm13*
Sue Bolton	2102	*sjb28*	Darren Miller	3815	*dm26*
David Broom	3229	*dlb10*	Darren Munday	3821	*dam6*
Mike Brudenell	3811	*pmb1*	Colin Noble	1747	*cdn1*
John Byrne	3812	*jcb1*	Nicola Normandale	4695	*ncn1*
Michael Clark	3745	*mpc3*	Phil O'Connell	3825	*paoc1*
Arthur Clune	3129	*ajc22*	Heather Payne	3800	*hp501*
Steve Downes	3741	*sd21*	Suran Perera	4689	*sjp25*
Ken Finch	4452	*kf1*	Aimee Phillips	3897	*amp11*
Rob Fletcher	3816	*rpf1*	Tamsyn Quormby	4346	*tq1*
Iain Ford	3894	*igf500*	Chris Reece	3807	*car7*
Kevin Gardner	3739	*pkg4*	Sam Scott	3817	*svs2*
Chris Gowland	3823	*cg1*	Daniel Shelton	4349	*ds23*
Dan Granville	3839	*dsg2*	Jenny Smailes	4455	*jj5*
Sarah Hall	3827	*seh11*	Philip Smailes	3833	*pjrs1*
Peter Halls	3806	*pjh1*	Andrew Smith	3809	*abs4*
John Hawes	4347	*jeh11*	Ben Thompson	3230	*bt4*
Susanne Hodges	3839	*sh32*	Pete Turnbull	3804	*pnt1*
Matt Holmes	3820	*mjh25*	Sam Vines	3749	*sccv1*
Geoff Houlton	2100	*gph2*	Jonathan Wheeler	3818	*jdw5*
John Hutchinson	3898	*jh57*	Timothy Willson	2123	*ftmw1*
Chris Kilgour	4454	*crhk1*			

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