



THE UNIVERSITY *of York*  
*Computing Service*

# Keynotes

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## Web Strategy Pilot Study Project:

the future plans for Portals and  
Content Management Systems

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**From the Editor**

The Network Access Service, which allows users to connect their own laptops to the network through various dedicated sockets around campus, has proved popular since its introduction two years ago. On page 1, Matt Holmes details the planned expansion of this service, which will include the introduction of wireless hot spots.



From time to time we have the opportunity to feature guest authors in Keynotes. In this issue, we're pleased to have William Mackintosh of the Web Office writing about the Web Strategy Pilot Study Project on pages 2 and 3.



Finally, the Information Systems Group has more changes afoot with the introduction of a new Data-Warehouse. Turn to page 4 for Geoff Houlton's overview of the changes.

*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/](http://www.york.ac.uk/services/cserv/offdocs/keynotes/)

## Network Access Service *Matt Holmes*

Over the last two years the Computing Service has been running a service called the Network Access Service (NAS). This allows staff and students to connect their personal laptops to dedicated network sockets in several areas on campus. This facility has proved very popular and in the last six months work has been carried out to move the service into its next phase. Shortly after the start of the Spring Term, a new NAS service will be launched, introducing more access sockets and rolling out wireless network hot spots. The first area to be covered by this new service will be the Library where five wired sockets and a wireless hot spot will be available. Once this has been successfully completed, work will continue to provide wired or wireless access in the following areas:

- All the College bars
- Goodricke dining hall (opposite the Porters Lodge)
- Roger Kirk Centre
- Biology promenade
- Kings Manor
- Physics Concourse

The roll out is expected to be completed by the start of the Summer term. More details about the NAS service can be found from the web site [www.nas.york.ac.uk](http://www.nas.york.ac.uk) which will be updated with information about the new service as soon as it is available.

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## Computing Service training courses – online feedback *Susanne Hodges*

This term we have asked course participants to use the online feedback system when providing course evaluations. Results have shown that in general staff enjoy our courses and that they provide useful skills. A small proportion found that they did not have time to finish working through the materials. We are monitoring this but believe that it is best to provide extra materials in the workbooks, so that participants have the information available at their desk; course tutors are happy to provide support outside of the class.

Unfortunately, since introducing online feedback, the proportion of submissions has substantially dropped, with an average response rate of less than 40%, compared to 70% using paper evaluations. If you participate in a Computing Service course, please fill in the online feedback form – we take note of your comments and use them when developing our courses.

## New look Access courses *Jonathan Wheeler*

In response to feedback from previous participants, the Computing Service Microsoft Access course for Staff and Graduates will be split into two parts.

The first part, **Introduction to Access**, consists of two 2 hour sessions. It is designed for beginners who want to gain a basic understanding of Microsoft Access, and runs on 9 and 16 February.

### Introduction to Access course objectives

- Finding your way around Access menus
- Using and creating tables
- Importing data
- Querying data (select queries)
- Creating forms
- Creating reports
- Using Access for mailmerges

The second part, **Further Access**, also consists of two 2 hour sessions. This course is designed for those who have attended the Introduction course or who have sufficient knowledge and understanding of Access. It will focus more on the type of queries used in data analysis work as well as the basics of designing a relational database. It takes place on 23 February and 2 March.

### Further Access course objectives

- Creating and using Action queries (insert, update, delete and make table)
- Creating Parameter queries
- Creating Crosstab Queries
- Using the wizards to find duplicates and non-matched data
- Creating Relational Databases
- Using Primary keys
- Querying Related Tables

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## Agresso web requisitioning *Nicola Normandale*

Web requisitioning in Agresso has experienced a few ups and downs in the first months of use. Occasionally, items ordered from the stationery store, or from Biology stores would get ‘stuck’ at the workflow stage, and never reach the relevant store. Thankfully, we have now corrected this problem, so are now confident that your stores orders will always be processed.

To help those ordering from stores, whether via the web or directly at the counter, there is now an online stores catalogue at <http://www.york.ac.uk/univ/mis/cfm/storescat/>, where you can view what is stocked in each store, its price and availability. This reads directly from the Agresso tables so is always up to date.

For those departments that use web requisitions for external orders, this has generally worked well. However, because of the way we have Agresso set up at York, mixing external orders with stores orders on one requisition means the external orders will not be processed. This is a feature we have to live with, so those who use web requisitions for external orders need to be careful not to do this.

# Web Strategy Pilot Study Project

## William Mackintosh

### Background

The University's Web Strategy ([www.york.ac.uk/coord/docs/webstrategy.pdf](http://www.york.ac.uk/coord/docs/webstrategy.pdf)) was developed during 2002-2003. In summary, the Strategy aims to deliver a web presence which:

- a. Supports publication of high quality content;
- b. Allows ease of use for site visitors;
- c. Has a support infrastructure for Departmental Web Officers;
- d. Has appropriate technical underpinning;
- e. Facilitates internal and external communication;
- f. Builds a portfolio of online services;
- g. Engenders confidence;
- h. Promotes efficiency;
- i. Complies with legislation;
- j. Demonstrates effectiveness;
- k. Has clear governance.

During 2003/2004, the Web Strategy Pilot Study Project (WSPSP) was set up by Web Committee to take forward the implementation of the Web Strategy 2004-2008:

*The aim is to run a pilot study during 2003/2004 to learn more about the type of software and tactics needed to implement the Web Strategy.*

*Web Strategy, Section 5.1*

### Pilot Activities

The WSPSP Team undertook a range of activities including:

#### A requirements gathering exercise

In August 2003, members of Web Forum met to discuss the features that Departmental Web Officers (DWOs) require from portal and content management software. A long and comprehensive list of features was identified ([www.york.ac.uk/coord/wspsp/maindocuments/requirements.doc](http://www.york.ac.uk/coord/wspsp/maindocuments/requirements.doc)) most of which relate to two main themes: the publishing process (ease of use and suitability for users with all levels of technical ability) and the ability to target web pages to a particular audience. These two themes were heavily tested during the Pilot year.

#### The testing of a CMS (Content Management System)

A CMS is a piece of software which supports the creation, management and publication of information on the web. The CMS provides the ability to manage the structure of a site, the appearance of the published pages and the navigation provided to visitors. The CMS would streamline the publication process and be of great benefit to non-technical DWOs.

Polopoly, ([www.polopoly.com/](http://www.polopoly.com/)), a Swedish content management software house, visited York on 30 March and 1 April to offer training in their software. After the visit, the Web Office web site was ported into Polopoly to gain practical experience of using the software.

#### The evaluation of a Portal

Doorways and gates come in a variety of types, shapes, sizes and colours. Similarly, there is a range of software products which are categorised as portals. The purpose of a portal is to act as a gateway to an organisation's information. The portal draws together information and electronic resources which are available to an organisation and presents them as a single point of access. Oracle's portal product (9iAS), ([www.oracle.com/solutions/enterprise\\_portals/](http://www.oracle.com/solutions/enterprise_portals/)) was installed and configured at York as part of the Pilot year.

### Findings

The key findings of the Team included:

#### Editing environment

The key selling point of any CMS is the editing environment (the software used by non-technical users to create web pages). Some editing environments operate on the ability to edit an entire web page whilst others edit one component of a web page at a time.

The editing environment is crucial and care must be taken during procurement to carefully evaluate the user-friendliness of the editing software.

### Accessibility (SENDA legislation)

Virtually all vendors claim that their software generates accessible web pages. Research has shown that the term accessibility is largely open to interpretation. Some software vendors would allow York to define accessibility and generate appropriate templates. In other cases, accessibility is under the sole control of the software vendor. It is imperative that York is able to locally define and easily amend accessible templates.

For example, in the case of Oracle 9iAS portal software, accessibility is controlled by Oracle whereas with Polopoly, accessibility is under the direction of York.

### Web page migration

The WSPSP Team recognised the sheer scale of web page migration. Consideration was given to how the task could be automated. However, after consultation with other universities, it was recognised that automated migration is not feasible. To take advantage of new features offered by a CMS and to check the accuracy and relevance of content, the migration has to be a manual process.

### Information design

The information design which covers core navigation and central versus departmental key content is essential to the success of a university web site. In advance of the rollout of the CMS and Portal, careful thought needs to be given to the information architecture which will underpin YorkWeb.

### Templates

The Web Office will develop a series of web templates which meet accessibility and visual identity requirements.

### Phased rollout

To reduce the inherent risks associated with a “big bang” launch and in recognition of the major migration effort required from Departmental Web Officers, the WSPSP Team has recommended a phased implementation of software.

This term, the full project report was presented to Information Committee and SIPSG (Strategic Information Projects Steering Group). The report can be found at [www.york.ac.uk/coord/wspsp/maindocuments/wspspreport.doc](http://www.york.ac.uk/coord/wspsp/maindocuments/wspspreport.doc).

The Web Strategy Pilot Study Project Team web site is located at [www.york.ac.uk/coord/wspsp/](http://www.york.ac.uk/coord/wspsp/).

### Way forward

The Web Strategy Pilot Study Project officially ran from 1 August, 2003 until 31 July, 2004. The work of the original group is now being progressed by the Web Development Project Team (WDPT), [www.york.ac.uk/coord/wdpt/](http://www.york.ac.uk/coord/wdpt/) which reports to Web Committee and SIPSG. One of the first tasks of the WDPT is to build the business case for content management and portal software. A draft software specification has been compiled and feedback on the document is actively encouraged. Please see [www.york.ac.uk/coord/cmsportal/](http://www.york.ac.uk/coord/cmsportal/) for information on how to submit comments. Feedback is extremely important so that the needs of web authors and users of YorkWeb are fully taken into account as part of the software selection process.

### Staff news

#### *Mike Jinks*

Linda Bailey started her maternity leave on 28 November, only to give birth on that day, a month before the expected date. After a short period in special care, Grace Louise is back home and doing well, as is her mother. We wish Linda every happiness with her new responsibilities. We welcome Heather Payne who is covering for Linda during her maternity leave, and hope that she will have an enjoyable time with us.

Congratulations to Kashif Amin on his appointment to the vacancy for a technician following the departure of Dave Chambers. His appointment results in a vacancy for a more junior post, which is being advertised.

## New Data-Warehouse

*Geoff Houlton*

A new Data-Warehouse is being introduced during 2005 and this article provides an overview of why this change is happening, who it will affect and what to expect.

### What is the Data-Warehouse?

Many large organisations have a need to hold large volumes of data about their operation, in a form suitable for querying and reporting. The Data-Warehouse meets that need for the University of York, and for almost ten years it has been used by a wide variety of staff to produce management information on students, financial accounts, building and space records etc. This data has been extracted from the MAC system on a nightly basis, and loaded into a Data-Warehouse running on Interbase technology. The advent of new YIMS systems has opened-up new possibilities for reporting within each of those individual software packages, but a user survey earlier this year confirmed the continuing need for a Data-Warehouse to meet particular needs.

### Why a new Data-Warehouse?

The primary reason is technological. There are a number of serious limitations in the current Interbase technology; it offers only limited functionality, is no longer being developed, and is incompatible with new YIMS databases and the Business Objects reporting software. The new Data-Warehouse is based on modern Oracle database technology, which offers a whole raft of new functionality, a guaranteed development path, together with compatibility with YIMS Oracle databases and Business Objects.

Secondly, the design of the current Data-Warehouse has acted as a constraint. It relies upon a series of programs to extract, transfer, re-format and load data each night. This lengthy process is prone to failures e.g. because data is not always in the expected format. Correcting the fault causes delays and inconvenience, with knock-on effects on other services relying on the Data-Warehouse. With a new Data-Warehouse based on Oracle, a single program will be able to extract, validate and load data, taking care to preserve the integrity of the database and avoid attempting to load corrupt data. The process will be faster, more resilient and easier to support.

Finally, we are looking to offer improvements to users of the new Data-Warehouse. It will allow users to see data from several sources brought together into one place – for example, to compare student admissions statistics from the SITS system with admissions statistics from previous years taken from the MAC system. It will also offer options for re-loading data on various frequencies e.g. every hour, or even potentially viewing data from YIMS databases in ‘real-time’.

### Who will this affect?

Anyone currently using the Data-Warehouse! Our records suggest around 300 staff, from across almost all departments, fall into this category. We are also aware that some departments have developed programs which extract data from the Data-Warehouse into departmental databases, and these will also be affected.

Although there will inevitably be some changes with using the new Data-Warehouse, we are aiming wherever possible to keep these to a minimum. The transition will be most straightforward for staff who are already querying the Data-Warehouse using Microsoft Access, and we would strongly recommend any staff still using the obsolete Paradox software to switch to Access as soon as possible. Help is available at:

**[www.york.ac.uk/services/cserv/admin/dwhaccess.htm](http://www.york.ac.uk/services/cserv/admin/dwhaccess.htm)**

### What happens next?

During the Spring Term, we will be introducing the new Data-Warehouse in parallel with the old system – in order to allow colleagues a period during which they can switch to the new system. We will be contacting users individually with instructions on how to switch to the new Data-Warehouse. In this first phase, it will comprise data from the SITS Student Records system only.

During the Summer Term, we will be investigating the addition of data from other sources e.g. historical student admissions statistics from MAC.

By the Autumn Term, we will be looking to decommission the old Data-Warehouse.

If you have any questions on any of the issues mentioned, please contact Geoff Houlton ([gph2@york.ac.uk](mailto:gph2@york.ac.uk)).

## 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/](http://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	<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>	Chris Kilgour	4454	<i>crhk1</i>
Gavin Atkinson	3738	<i>ga9</i>	Fergus McGlynn	3822	<i>fam6</i>
Amanda Bacon	3802	<i>agb12</i>	John Marsden	3832	<i>jpm1</i>
Sue Bolton	2102	<i>sjb28</i>	John Mason	3813	<i>jrm13</i>
David Broom	3229	<i>dlb10</i>	Darren Miller	3815	<i>dm26</i>
Mike Brudenell	3811	<i>pmb1</i>	Darren Munday	3821	<i>dam6</i>
John Byrne	3812	<i>jcb1</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>	Heather Payne	3800	<i>hp501</i>
Ken Finch	4452	<i>kfl</i>	Suran Perera	4689	<i>sjp25</i>
Rob Fletcher	3816	<i>rpf1</i>	Aimee Phillips	3897	<i>amp11</i>
Iain Ford	3894	<i>igf500</i>	Tamsyn Quormby	4346	<i>tq1</i>
Kevin Gardner	3739	<i>pkg4</i>	Chris Reece	3807	<i>car7</i>
Chris Gowland	3823	<i>cg1</i>	Sam Scott	3817	<i>svs2</i>
Dan Granville	3819	<i>dsg2</i>	Daniel Shelton	4349	<i>ds23</i>
Sarah Hall	3827	<i>seh11</i>	Jenny Smailes	4455	<i>jj5</i>
Peter Halls	3806	<i>pjh1</i>	Philip Smailes	3833	<i>pjrs1</i>
John Hawes	4347	<i>jeh11</i>	Andrew Smith	3809	<i>abs4</i>
Susanne Hodges	3839	<i>sh32</i>	Ben Thompson	3230	<i>bt4</i>
Matt Holmes	3820	<i>mjh25</i>	Pete Turnbull	3804	<i>pnt1</i>
Geoff Houlton	2100	<i>gph2</i>	Sam Vines	3749	<i>sccv1</i>
John Hutchinson	3898	<i>jh57</i>	Jonathan Wheeler	3818	<i>jdw5</i>