Keynotes

IMPLEMENTING THE VLE

Also in this Issue:

Decommissioning MAC and the Alphas

Withdrawal of Office 2000

People Database Project

New offsite VPN service

Classroom upgrades

From the Editor

As many of you will be aware, the University has selected Blackboard to be its central VLE. On page 4, Sarah Mitchell and John Byrne give some background to the decision to invest in a VLE, outline the timetable for implementation, and explain the role of the Computing Service in the process.

You may recall that, unfortunately, some classroom upgrades planned for the summer had to be delayed. We're pleased to announce that upgrades in Langwith and the Library have now been scheduled to take place during the Easter vacation. Full details are on page 2.

Joanne Casey

Contents

Keynotes on the web

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

Keynotes

Computer consumables
Chris Gowland

In response to demand via the 2004 User Satisfaction Survey to extend the range of consumables available for purchase, the Computing Service has approached Commercial Services with the idea of vending IT products, and is pleased to announce that the first machine is scheduled for installation in the Morrell Library in April.

The vending machine will provide fast and convenient access to over 30 of the most-requested computer consumables, all at competitive prices. Commercial Services will manage the contract with the vending firm, who are a leading IT retailer with experience of vending IT products at other UK universities.

Computer consumables are already available on campus at a number of stores and retail outlets, although the Computing Service will withdraw sales at the Information Desk when the vending machine is operational; our role will be to work closely with Commercial Services to advise them on IT products. Additional machines will be installed if the enterprise is successful, with King's Manor, Physics and Halifax College all under consideration as likely sites.

We welcome any suggestions for products suitable for vending; please email **infodesk@york.ac.uk** and let us know your requirements.

Disaster recovery facility
Robert Demaine

Funding has been allocated by the University to develop a disaster recovery facility for the Computing Service. The new facility will house servers and networking equipment to increase the resilience of critical services, and could be used as an emergency command centre in the event of the Computing Service building being unavailable for use.

Easter and May bank holidays

The Computing Service building will be closed on each of the four bank holidays in March and May: Good Friday (25 March), Easter Monday (28 March), May Day (2 May), and the Spring Bank Holiday (30 May). 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 and no staff will be on duty to attend to faults.

New offsite VPN service goes live
Robert Demaine

The trial VPN service, which gave off-campus users secure access to University IT resources, was decommissioned at the end of January. It has been replaced by a new service which forms part of a redesigned and expanded Network Access Service (NAS). Users of the trial service were transparently moved across to the NAS during the transition.

The Network Access Service offers a number of different modes of working. New users will need to set up a password before visiting the registration page to register for access to specific services. Visit the web page at **nas.york.ac.uk** for more information.

Shutdown of email service

The email service will be shut down on Saturday 9th April from 08:00 to 19:00. This is to allow for essential system maintenance and enhancements to improve the reliability and performance of the service. While the service is shut down, users will not be able to send or receive email on University email accounts. Incoming email will be stored on the mail servers pending restoration of the service.

Netskills training materials
Susanne Hodges

Netskills is the primary UK provider of internet related training to the HE and FE communities.

The Computing Service has renewed its Gold Scheme licence on behalf of the University for the complete range of Netskills' training modules. The Gold Scheme also provides any new materials that are released during the year, as they become available.

Netskills' materials can be used for providing training to both staff and students as well as for personal development. Each training module contains presentations or instructional materials plus practical hands-on exercises to consolidate learning. They can be tailored to develop appropriate training courses, lectures, tutorials and self paced study programmes. They may not be used for commercial purposes.

To access the materials, or for further information, visit: **www.york.ac.uk/services/cserv/advice/netskills.html**. You will need to register to receive a user ID and password: once you have these you may download, use and adapt the materials, as required.

SNS takeup
Matt Holmes

The Student Network Service (SNS) went live on the 11th of October after being expanded to cover approximately 3500 study bedrooms - all on campus college accomodation.

Subscription to the service currently stands at 77% overall which is split between the colleges in a fairly even manner - Halifax 85%, James 82%, Alcuin 87%, Wentworth 79%, Derwent 92%, Langwith 90%, Vanbrugh 76%, Goodricke 76%. The two exceptions are St Lawrence Court with 62% and Edens Court with 68%; lower take-up rates in these areas have been attributed to a reduced number of lets within those accomodation blocks.

Keynotes

Classroom upgrades
Brian Souter

Work is scheduled to replace the classroom PCs in Study Area L/050 below Langwith College Library and in Study Area R/113 on the first floor of the Morrell Library; funding is now in place for work that was originally planned for last summer. The upgrade will be carried out over the Easter Vacation, week commencing Monday 11 April.

L/050 will be equipped with 21 Pentium 4 PCs with 3.00GHz CPU, 512MB memory, LCD TFT display screens (flat screens), CD writers and accessible USB ports; R/113 will be equipped with 14 identical PCs. All PCs will run the University's standard supported desktop system, Windows 2000.

The usual programme of PC replacement and cleaning over the Summer Vacation is still being planned for this year, and should be announced in Keynotes next term.

Withdrawal of Office 2000
Joanne Casey

As announced in October's Keynotes, we are moving to Office XP on all supported desktop PCs. This is a move away from the hybrid combination of Microsoft Outlook 2002 (also known as Outlook XP), along with components of Microsoft Office 2000 (eg Word 2000, Excel 2000) which was previously offered. Providing the full Office XP suite enables us to offer a more uniform, up-to-date environment.

Office XP has been the standard software on classroom PCs since the beginning of the Autumn term, and Departments have had the chance to upgrade at a time convenient to them since then. It is intended that Office 2000 will be withdrawn during the Easter vacation, and Departmental Computing Officers have been contacted to ensure that all Departments complete the upgrade to Office XP before the withdrawal.

Staff news
Mike Jinks

Suran Perera left us in January to take up a permanent post in the Applications Support Team within the MIS Group at the University of Edinburgh. We hope that the grounding he gained working on the YIMS systems at York will serve him well in his new role in a much larger organisation – the MIS Group at Edinburgh is larger than the whole Computing Service at York. We wish him well in his career.

Welcome to Gavin Jones who joined us on 21 February as Systems Administrator (Microsoft Windows). Gavin joins us from the National Museums and Galleries of Wales where he has been involved with the management of their PC systems. As well as providing valuable additional support for our PC systems, Gavin will be involved in developing the next generation of PC services for the University. We wish him well in his time with us.

Gavin Jones

Decommissioning MAC and the Alphas
Geoff Houlton

This year sees the final demise of some major software and hardware that has served the University for many years; the MAC System and its Alpha servers. This system arose from the "MAC Initiative" (Management and Administrative Computing) instigated by the University Grants Committee back in 1988. This initiative aimed to encourage universities to collaborate on the development of integrated administrative systems, working in 'families' based around technology – the University of York joined the family based around Powerhouse technology.

The MAC Initiative formally came to an end in 1995, by which point the University was well on the way to implementing its software for Personnel, Payroll, Finance, Research Accounting, Student Records etc. However, by 1999 it was clear that, to take advantage of new technologies and more modern working practices, a new initiative was needed – this time at local level. Hence the YIMS Programme, and its introduction of systems such as Resourcelink (Personnel and Payroll), Kronos (Time and Attendance), PAMS (Student Accommodation), SITS (Student Record) and Agresso (Finance and Research Accounting).

In its final year, YIMS is replacing the last major software components from the MAC/Alpha era, by implementing two new systems; Kinetics (Hospitality and Conference Booking) and Planon (Estate and Facility Management). These systems are due to go live in March and July respectively.

As a result, the Computing Service is running a project to decommission the MAC system and its Alpha servers by December 2005. We are conscious that some colleagues are still reliant on historical data held on these servers and, where necessary, we would be prepared to provide this data in some other format e.g. on CD. Some colleagues may also still be using software on these servers of which we are unaware. Therefore, if you feel there is data or software in MAC or the Alphas that is still relevant to your work, please contact Geoff Houlton, **gph2@york.ac.uk**, with the details.

People Database Project - Associates
Brian Souter

Following the successful introduction of the People Database in July 2004, a new module will be rolled out in April 2005 that integrates the functionality of the current Associates Database. Authorised departmental representatives will be able to search the People Database, add and modify associates, and add affiliations to provide continuity and informal access to resources. The demise of the Associates Database requires a name change for the current Associates Database Officers, and we have introduced the term People Database Administrators, or PDAs.

The purpose of the People Database is to provide basic information on staff and students in a uniform format for use by service providers such as the Computing Service and the Library. The system also keeps track of people as they change status, e.g. a student becoming a member of staff. It is important that staff and students who do not appear in the personnel or student record systems are entered in the People Database. To this end, the Registrar's Office provides information on staff endorsed by Senate, Personnel provides information on members of the Temp Pool, and PDAs provide information on departmental associates such as visitors.

If you are involved with appointing someone, arranging a visitor or renewing a contract, you may need to consider contacting your PDA to have their details entered or updated in the People Database. The system can also be used to provide the Computing Service and Library with timely data on new members of staff who have not yet been entered in the personnel system; PDAs will be able to generate a welcome page that includes a Computing Service username and password, and information on how to use the Library.

Stata
David Surtees

The Computing Service is pleased to announce that it has purchased twenty five concurrent licences of the statistical analysis package Stata, as a result of departmental input into the software wish list (URL). Stata is being rolled out to supported PCs and classrooms.

Purchase of Stata was approved by Computing Committee in response to requests from a number of Departments via the Software Wishlist. The Wishlist can be found at: **www.york.ac.uk/services/cserv/sw/wishlist.yrk/wishlist.htm**. Requests for additions to the list should be sent via your Departmental Computing Officer.

New University Virtual Learning Environment (VLE)
Sarah Mitchell and John Byrne

Following an extensive consultation and tendering process involving University committees, departments, staff and students, the University has selected the Blackboard Academic Suite package as its central VLE that will enable departments and services to deliver teaching online, via the web. The system will rolled out over a number of months under the guidance of the VLE project Implementation Group headed by Dr Richard Walker from the Planning Support Office. Key long-term pedagogic support for departments will be provided by the E-Learning development team, also headed by Richard Walker, consisting of two learning technologists, a multimedia developer and the Blackboard application manager.

Why invest in a VLE?

Increasing numbers of universities are investing in a centrally supported VLE, in response to growth in IT in schools and resulting student expectation. Learning and teaching online enables the University to:

- Meet the needs of a more diverse student body. Part-time or distance learning students, and those on placement or leave of absence can study where and when it suits them, just by logging on to the web.
- Provide enhanced student support in an efficient and flexible way e.g. self-assessment exercises which provide immediate feedback; managing individual email enquiries from students; encouraging peer support through bulletin boards and chatrooms.
- Sustain high quality small group teaching across a growing student population, through 'live' online seminars and tutorials, which also relieve pressure on teaching space.
- Enable online staff IT training for all categories of staff, e.g. Computing Service courses, and other courses available from DIAL.

As well as delivering whole programmes online, a VLE can be used to complement class-based activities, and departments will be able to choose the extent to which they do so.

During the Summer Term 2005, departments will be invited to bid to mount the first pilot courses to be hosted within the VLE from January 2006. Implementation will continue on a staged basis, and full deployment is projected for October 2008.

Further information on VLEs and the University's selection processes can be found at:
www.york.ac.uk/univ/org/learntech

The role of the Computing Service

The Computing Service will be supporting three processes in relation to the VLE:

1. System administration

Installation and maintenance of the core Blackboard software and databases, ensuring that Blackboard is available for use by departments and users. Particular emphasis is being placed on implementing high availability options such as clustering and load balancing.

2. Systems integration

Ensuring that the VLE integrates with key systems and services such as the SITS student records system, the Library, and other key systems and services. This includes data exchange and single-signon facilities to web-based resources. Integration also covers support for embedding custom tools developed by departments for use within the VLE.

3. Basic user support

The Computing Service plans to provide training to students in the use of the VLE, as part of the Iliad for University programme. General user support needs will be monitored as the VLE is rolled out, and will be responded to appropriately.

For further information about Computing Service involvement please contact John Byrne (**jcb1@york.ac.uk**).

Keynotes

Contacting the Computing Service

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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.

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*
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Sue Bolton	2102	*sjb28*		John Marsden	3832	*jpm1*	
David Broom	3229	*dlb10*		John Mason	3813	*jrm13*	
Mike Brudenell	3811	*pmb1*		Darren Miller	3815	*dm26*	
John Byrne	3812	*jcb1*		Darren Munday	3821	*dam6*	
Michael Clark	3745	*mpc3*		Colin Noble	1747	*cdn1*	
Arthur Clune	3129	*ajc22*		Nicola Normandale	4695	*ncn1*	
Steve Downes	3741	*sd21*		Phil O'Connell	3825	*paoc1*	
Ken Finch	4452	*kf1*		Heather Payne	3800	*hp501*	
Rob Fletcher	3816	*rpf1*		Aimee Phillips	3897	*amp11*	
Iain Ford	3894	*igf500*		Tamsyn Quormby	4346	*tq1*	
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Chris Gowland	3823	*cg1*		Sam Scott	3817	*svs2*	
Dan Granville	3819	*dsg2*		Daniel Shelton	4349	*ds23*	
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Peter Halls	3806	*pjh1*		Philip Smailes	3833	*pjrs1*	
John Hawes	4347	*jeh11*		Andrew Smith	3809	*abs4*	
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contact information

Keynotes