

Keynotes

Volume 33 Number 2 February 2007

The Mail Issue:

- **New Authenticated SMTP Service**
- **Upgraded Webmail Service**
- **Updates to Usenet News**

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From the Editor

Recent months have seen a number of developments and upgrades centred around the University's email system. Turn to pages 2 and 3 to read Mike Brudenell's reports of the new authenticated SMTP service, which will offer particular advantages to 'mobile' users, and of upgrades to the Usenet News and Webmail services.



Members of the Computing Service are working with representatives from the Finance Department, Web Office and Student Administrative Services on a project to provide the University with an online payments system. Geoff Houlton gives more detail of the project on page 4.



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/

Power saving on classroom PCs

Andrew Smith

At the start of the spring term we implemented new power saving features on classroom PCs.

The first is to switch the screens off after ten minutes of inactivity. Moving the mouse or pressing a key on the keyboard will switch the screen on again.

The second measure is to switch PCs off overnight. After 22.00, unused PCs are switched off automatically. At 07.30 the PCs are automatically restarted so that they can install updates and new software ready for taught classes at 09.00. To use a PC during the night the user must press the power-on button to start the PC. The PC will then shut itself down again later in the night after the user has logged out.

Staff news

Mike Jinks

We welcome Stevienna de Saille (Stevie) as the Software Consultant (Databases) in the Support Services Group.

Stevie has had extensive experience as an independent IT contractor, working around the world on a variety of projects. Before joining us, she was working on a project with the Feminist Archive North at Leeds University, developing a web site and an Access front-end for a database system. Stevie will have plenty of opportunities to utilise her diverse skills at York and we wish her well in her new role.



Stevie de Saille

Windows XP

Joanne Casey

A Computing Service project has been set up to oversee the introduction of the Windows XP operating system on supported PCs. The first stage of the project will see all Computing Service classroom PCs be rebuilt with Windows XP over the summer vacation. It is likely that one classroom will be converted as a pilot over the Easter vacation.

Office moves

Joanne Casey

The growth of the Computing Service has led to inevitable pressures on office space in our building. As a consequence, the majority of the Support Services Group have now moved to offices in the refurbished Vanbrugh C Block. The Information Desk in the main building remains the first point of contact for users.

ArcGIS

Peter Halls

There are two major developments with ArcGIS that will affect users: this article sets these out and explains what users need to do as a result.

The first concerns the central datastore. At present a variety of digital map data, satellite imagery, etc, are available for general use on the network resource `\\rentedfs\datasets`. To make these data available to a wider range of applications, we need to move them to the Oracle environment. We intend to do this during the Easter vacation; although the contents of `\\rentedfs\datasets` will remain 'as is' for the time-being, new data will be served through Oracle. However, prior to this all ArcGIS users need to update their installations to the latest Service Pack and patches. The Computing Service Classrooms have been updated. Users of supported Office PCs need to go to **Control Panel | Run Advertised Programs** and run the ArcGIS Update. Users of departmental networks with ArcGIS installed should consult their DCO. Users who have installed ArcGIS locally will need to update it themselves by mounting the network drive `\\rentedfs\appl` and opening the `arc\windows` folder to access the patches and a Word document, **UpdateArcGIS91.doc**, giving instructions as to what needs to be done. Each of the patches can be installed from `\\rentedfs\appl\arc\windows`: there is no need to download them to your PC.

The second is the release of ArcGIS 9.2. This version is effectively a major release with many valuable additional tools, and a new way of working. From ArcGIS 9.2, the Access database based 'Personal Geodatabase' is replaced. For users at York, this change will have the benefit of moving the local data store to the Oracle database, with the attendant advantages of access from other PCs, guaranteed backup and a greater facility to be able to use the data in other applications, including statistical packages. It also introduces a new way of handling computationally intensive operations, by providing a central server to which such operations can be dispatched, the results being returned to the Desktop. The ArcGIS 9.2 Server provides support for ArcGIS access through a web browser, enabling users of Linux and Apple systems to use ArcGIS for the first time and removing the need for ArcGIS to be installed on a PC where usage will be light. ESRI have made a number of changes that may affect teaching materials: a list is available at: www.esri.com/software/arcgis/about/whats-new.html.

ArcGIS 9.2 was released in December 2006. Unfortunately, it is not easily possible to run both ArcGIS 9.1 and 9.2 at the same time and it is certainly not possible to install both on the same PC. There are also significant changes to the way the web mapping tool ArcIMS and the Oracle interface ArcSDE work, which seriously impact the way this upgrade can be rolled out. Because of these interactions, it is intended to upgrade to ArcGIS 9.2 during the Summer Vacation. We are in discussion to see if it is possible to create a test environment for ArcGIS 9.2, but this is at an early stage. Users, especially teachers, who think that they may need access to a test facility should contact Peter Halls as soon as possible, in order to discuss their requirements and so contribute to the assessment of the practicalities of a test environment.

New Authenticated SMTP Service for mobile users

Mike Brudenell

In January the Central Mail Service was enhanced to offer an Authenticated SMTP Service. This new service will be especially useful to you if you use your computer both at the University and away from campus: eg, if you are a staff member with a laptop that you use both in the office and at home, or if you are a student on the SNS and take your computer home during vacations.

SMTP is the protocol used by your mail reading program whenever you send an email. The University's SMTP Service runs on a computer called **smtp.york.ac.uk** - you will see this name if you look in the preference settings of your mail reading program: it is often labelled the Outgoing (SMTP) Mail Server.

Until now when you connected your computer to the Campus Network you were required to use the University's SMTP Service for all of your outgoing email. But when you took your computer away from campus you couldn't use the University's SMTP Service; instead you had to change your mail program's preference settings to use the SMTP server provided by your Internet Service Provider (ISP). This meant you had to change the setting each time you brought your computer onto campus or took it home.

With the new Authenticated SMTP Service you can now set your mail program to send University email through the University's mail service regardless of whether you are on- or off-campus - you no longer have to keep changing the setting back and forth.

Furthermore you are now also permitted to send non-University email via other organisations' mail systems provided they, too, offer an authenticated SMTP service. So for example if you have a Gmail account you can now send its outgoing messages through the Gmail authenticated SMTP server instead of the one belonging to the University.

What you need to know: the University's Authenticated SMTP Server

As its name suggests, the Authenticated SMTP Service requires you to prove your identity by supplying your username and password. Because this is sensitive information it will only let you do this when your mail client is using a securely encrypted connection to our server; this keeps both your password and email content secure on route to our mail system.

To use the Authenticated SMTP Service you will need to alter the settings in your email program. The information you will need to give is:

Outgoing (SMTP) server: **smtp.york.ac.uk**

Select the options to turn on secure connections and authentication.

If there is a text box to enter the "port" number make sure this is either 587 (if your mail program is using STARTTLS security) or 465 (if it is using SSL). Do not use the conventional port number of 25: this will not work when you are away from campus.

Enter your username and password (or wait to be asked to type them in when you try and send a message).

You should now find that you are now able to compose and send email regardless of whether you are on or off campus without having to alter the settings any further.

What you need to know: Other ISPs Authenticated SMTP Servers

When you are on-campus you can now connect to authenticated SMTP servers run by other ISPs and service providers. These must be listening for mail connections on either port number 587 or 465. You may need to check your service provider's help pages or with their Customer Support to find out if they offer such a service.

Important recommendations

If you configure your email program's preference settings yourself you should...

For your mail account here at the University you should set it to use our Authenticated SMTP Service. This will help you to send your email regardless of whether you are on- or off-campus. It will also future-proof your setup as we continue to adopt and promote use of the Authenticated SMTP Service in the future.

For other mail accounts we now recommend you do not use the University's SMTP Service (either Authenticated or regular) when setting up your mail client to access mail accounts hosted elsewhere: e.g., at your ISP, with GoogleMail, etc. Instead change the settings in your mail program for your non-University account to send the outgoing messages relating to that account direct to hosting organisation's own authenticated SMTP server.

By making these changes you will help ensure messages you send are delivered with minimal problems. For example some sites' anti-spam checks could be suspicious of accepting a message claiming to be from a Gmail address but actually arriving from our University's mail systems.

Usenet News service upgraded

Mike Brudenell

In October the University's Usenet News service was upgraded with a new version of the server software as well as being moved to run on a new computer. The new machine is faster and has more storage. This has resulted in much improved responsiveness when accessing the Usenet News Service, and also means that articles can be retained for much longer: typically over 30 days.

About Usenet News

Usenet News is a world-wide information system consisting of many different discussion forums, each known as a **newsgroup**. Each newsgroup focuses on a given area of interest and contains many different ongoing conversations under different headings. Usenet News servers 'talk' to each other, transmitting articles from one site to another: when an article is posted to a given newsgroup it quickly propagates to other Usenet News servers right around the world.

A typical Usenet News server carries thousands of different newsgroups. To help organise these into human-friendly sets each group has a name comprised of several parts separated by full-stops. Each part identifies a particular set of related newsgroups. For example the newsgroup **comp.sys.mac** is about computers (comp.) systems (sys.) Apple Macintosh (mac).

When articles arrive for a newsgroup they are stored centrally on the Usenet News server rather than cluttering up your inbox. You read articles by joining or subscribing to a newsgroup using news-reading software: as news articles arrive it will show them to you and let you read or reply to them, or create your own new articles.

It may help you visualise this by thinking of Usenet News in terms of email: each newsgroup is akin to a folder of messages, and each topic of conversation is like a number of emails sharing the same Subject heading. Indeed reading and posting to Usenet News groups is so like email some software handles both: for example Thunderbird, Outlook Express and Pine.

To read Usenet News you will need to set up one of these, or similar, newsreading software. In its preferences you will need to put the name of the University's Usenet news server: news.york.ac.uk

Note that our server requires you to authenticate using the username and password issued to you by the Computing Service before you can read or post any articles.

Getting started with Usenet News can be a little daunting as there are so many newsgroups to choose from: at the last count our server carries over 28,000 of these! So you should probably start gently by exploring our own University's newsgroups. These are private to our server and all have names beginning **york**. Good groups to start with are:

- york.talk (General discussion and talk)
- york.talk.technical (Technical talk)
- york.csr.v.help (A self-help group for questions about Computing Service facilities)
- york.csr.v.sns (A self-help forum about the Student Network Service)

Webmail service upgraded

Mike Brudenell

In November the University's Webmail Service was upgraded with a new version of the software being installed. This new release includes a number of useful new features:

Improved folder listing display indicates deleted messages more clearly.

When the spellchecker is used on replies that you are composing it can now skip over text that is quoted, meaning you aren't prompted to correct mistakes in the message you received - this is controlled by a new preference in the **Options** pages, and by default is **on**.

Received messages' text attachments can now be downloaded, making it easier to save some specialist word processor formats (eg. RTF) to your PC for subsequent editing.

Expunging messages marked for deletion can now request confirmation before being actioned - this is controlled by a new preference in the **Options** pages, and by default is **off**.

The Address Book display can now be sorted by clicking on its column headers - a new preference in the **Options** pages lets you select your preferred default ordering.

Address Book data can now be uploaded/downloaded using CSV-format files, suitable for use with mail clients such as Microsoft Outlook - Pine-format transfers continue to be available too.

The Address Book screen includes a new **Search University Directory** text box and button, which searches the University's LDAP service for people with publicly visible contact details.

Security and confidentiality improved

As part of this upgrade we have removed the ability to use non-secure webmail sessions; if you request a non-secure session (by using a URL beginning **http://**) you will be automatically redirected to the secure login page (which uses instead the URL beginning **https://**). This helps keep your password safe and email session confidential.

Thus the recommended URL to reach the Webmail Service continues to begin **https://webmail.york.ac.uk/**

Online Payments system

Geoff Houlton

A project is underway to implement an Online Payments system for the University. This article outlines the background to the project, work completed to date, and plans for the future.

Background

Few people would argue with the assertion that the Internet has transformed the way many of us order and pay for goods and services. Web-sites such as Ebay, Amazon etc have become an everyday part of life for millions of people. These sites are convenient and easy-to-use, and we trust them with confidential information (credit card numbers etc) because they use techniques such as secure servers and data encryption.

Many universities have adopted a similar approach for a range of goods and services, including;

- Paying for tuition or residence
- Top-ups for printing
- Alumni donations
- Conferences and events
- Concerts, tickets etc
- Memorabilia (scarves, mugs etc)

Hence the need for this project – intended to provide a system ultimately capable of handling all of the above.

Work to date

A project team has been drawn together, including representatives from Finance Department, Student Administrative Services, Web Office and Computing Service. Contact has also been made with a range of departments who are interested in Online Payments; to understand the volume and value of payments taken, and to explore how a central Online Payments system would link into their processes.

Research has also been undertaken, to explore; the range of options open to the University, potential suppliers of suitable systems, and experiences at other universities who have already implemented Online Payments.

Four key themes have emerged from this research; flexibility, security, integration and cost effectiveness.

Flexibility

The system must cater for the complexity and diversity of payments taken by the University, providing each department with the potential to manage their own online sales of goods and services, within a secure, centrally supported framework.

Security

The system must be highly secure. Not only is it handling people's confidential data (credit card details) but also their money! The credit card industry has developed a set of security standards known as PCI DSS which safeguard this sensitive data.

Integration

The system must be integrated into the University's existing financial system and processes.

Cost effectiveness

Most of the costs associated with Online Payments arise from the banks or 'payment service providers' who provide the means of transferring the customer's money into the University bank account. One nearby university reported a saving of £80,000 per annum, by re-negotiating these transaction charges. These negotiations are most successful where a university can demonstrate the large volume and value of transactions to be handled. Small-scale operations in individual departments tend to be quite expensive to run, by comparison.

Next steps

The project team is aiming to select a supplier for the Online Payments system in the near future. This supplier would provide a secure, hosted system which conforms to the highest security standards.

The team will then work with this supplier to provide the necessary integration with University systems. A pilot system will then be trialled for a period of time, to bed-in the new system before a wider roll-out to departments.

A project web-site has been established, to provide more background information on the project, and to communicate news at each key stage, at: www.york.ac.uk/services/cserv/offdocs/projects.yrk/onlinepay

Summer upgrade programme

Adrian Young

This summer, Computing Service will embark on another programme of software upgrades and installations on classroom and office PCs. In preparation for this, we will be contacting key stakeholders to ascertain which upgrades and new applications are required for the 2007/8 year.

To ensure we deliver updates and applications with the relevant configurations, we are seeking 'Software Application Champions' to help gather requirements and sign off updates and installations prior to full deployment.

This will be an important role within the programme, but shouldn't create much additional work for the champions. It is envisaged that the input needed will be initial requirements gathering meetings, to discuss installation options, and a User Acceptance Test once the applications have been packaged up and are ready to be deployed.

Without the requirements and sign off we may be unable to deploy applications or to configure them specifically for you, and this may lead to application functionality problems in the future.

If you would like to suggest an application for the upgrade programme please email infodesk@york.ac.uk. A list of potential new updates and applications will be published early in the summer term.

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 09.00 to 17.15 Monday to Friday (*may be closed for training Wednesdays 14.00-15.00*), for problem solving, advice and information, fault reporting, network connections, file restoration, course bookings and user registration.

Computing Service Staff

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|------------------------------|-----------------|------|-------------|
| Director: | Mike Jinks | 3801 | <i>kmj1</i> |
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| Head of Infrastructure: | Robert Demaine | 3808 | <i>rld1</i> |
| Head of Information Systems: | Kay Mills-Hicks | 2101 | <i>kmh8</i> |
| Head of Support Services: | David Surtees | 3803 | <i>dps4</i> |
| Information Officer: | Joanne Casey | 3805 | <i>jmc8</i> |

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| Mike Brudenell | 3811 | <i>pmb1</i> | Darren Miller | 3815 | <i>dm26</i> |
| John Byrne | 3812 | <i>jcb1</i> | Eleanor Morrison | 3742 | <i>emm502</i> |
| Arthur Clune | 3129 | <i>ajc22</i> | Darren Munday | 3821 | <i>dam6</i> |
| Stevie de Saille | 3818 | <i>smds500</i> | Nicola Normandale | 4695 | <i>ncn1</i> |
| Steve Downes | 3741 | <i>sd21</i> | Heather Payne | 3800 | <i>hp501</i> |
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| Rob Fletcher | 3816 | <i>rpf1</i> | Sam Scott | 3817 | <i>svs2</i> |
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| Chris Gowland | 3823 | <i>cg1</i> | Philip Smailes | 3833 | <i>pjrs1</i> |
| Dan Granville | 3819 | <i>dsg2</i> | Andrew Smith | 3809 | <i>abs4</i> |
| Kelvin Hai | 4689 | <i>kh525</i> | Brian Souter | 3814 | <i>bs1</i> |
| Sarah Hall | 3827 | <i>seh11</i> | Max Spicer | 3745 | <i>mjs510</i> |
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| Susanne Hodges | 3839 | <i>sh32</i> | Pete Turnbull | 3804 | <i>pnt1</i> |
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Keynotes

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