Software News:

. **Firefox**
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Volume 35:2 - [KEYNOTES ON THE WEB]
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News in Brief

News

From the Editor

The Cloud Computing project which
has seen extensive work both within
and without the Computing Service,
and which has attracted much attention,
has now concluded. The Project Team,
writing on page 6, give an overview of
the reasons to reject the use of cloud
computing services at this time,
a decision which, judging by the results
of the extensive user consultation, will
attract both disappointment and relief
from amongst our users.

In the October issue of Keynotes, we
mentioned the introduction of our
comments cards. I'm pleased to report
that these are proving very successful,
and have elicited useful feedback, some
of which we've been able to act on.
On page 4, Aimee Phillips gives more
detail of the comments received, and the
subsequent responses.

Planning for our annual software
upgrades has now begun; please turn
to page 5 to find out how to submit a
request for new or upgraded software.

JOANNE CASEY

keynotes

Berrick Saul Building
ROBERT DEMAINE

Readers may have noticed the distinctive curves of the Berrick Saul Building currently under construction on the site formerly occupied by the Language and Linguistics Department. Scheduled for completion in June, the building is intended to be a dynamic focus for interdisciplinary research in the arts and humanities as well as the new home of the Institute for Effective Education.

With over 1100 data outlets, the Berrick Saul Building will have a robust IT infrastructure which also includes diversely routed campus network connectivity and a pervasive internal wireless network. Although primarily an academic building, space has been made available for a new Computing Service server room, designed with a strong emphasis on energy efficiency.

Keeping Track of Orders
LORRAINE MOOR

For the last few years, we have used ETS to keep track of purchase ordering of PCs, printers and other IT equipment. During this term we intend to move over to Footprints. Anyone wishing to purchase equipment through the Computing Service should send a Goods Demand and Charge Note to us as previously; the only difference will be that you will receive notification of the order via Footprints instead of ETS.

Easter & May Bank Holidays
BRIAN SOUTER

The IT Support Office will close on the four coming bank holidays: Good Friday (10 April), Easter Monday (13 April), May Day (4 May) and Spring Bank Holiday (25 May). All services will be available as usual outside normal hours; no staff will be on duty to attend to faults. Access to PC classrooms is subject to college hours. To save energy, classroom PCs are shut down each evening and don't restart automatically outside term; they may be switched on as required.

PC Room Maintenance and Printing BRIAN SOUTER

Each year we set out a programme of works to maintain and improve the facilities in our PC classrooms. This year, we are planning to replace 142 PCs in rooms G/169, D/114, L/050 and D/016. A further 122 PCs will be upgraded with additional memory to allow for Office 2007, and 25 flat screens will be replaced in room R/002 in the Morrell Library. The work will also include PC and room cleaning, and checks and rebuilds of all the remaining PCs; the detailed programme will be published on the web in due course.

With the end of life of the high performance PCs in D/016, the room will be removed from the teaching pool and become a dedicated PC study area, a facility long requested by Derwent College. With new PCs, printing and scanning facilities, the aim is to increase occupancy and make the facility as popular as the one in neighbouring Langwith College.

As part of the continued development of our PC classrooms and study areas, there may be the opportunity to use capital funding to provide an exemplar study area in either Derwent D/016 or Langwith L/138. We are currently considering ways of obtaining feedback from students on their expectations for such an area, and we are engaging with a design company to obtain some forward-looking design concepts. Should we go ahead with this scheme, the choice of location will depend on the facilities required, and the suitability of the accommodation.

The classroom print system, along with the current HP 9000DN printers, will continue in service for a further year, although we are planning to install a number of additional printers to compensate for problems with the speed of delivery which has attracted a number of complaints. The ultimate solution is to replace the print system along with a new range of hardware, but first we need to review the services we offer; a review group will be set up with the aim of delivering a recommendation by the summer. The group will gather feedback and consider user needs for printing and scanning, including A4, A3, duplex and colour, and will examine the cost per page to provide these services.

Staff News
MIKE JINKS

We are pleased to welcome Tom Borgia, who joins our team of technicians, and John Grannan, who is the new Head of Infrastructure Group. Tom previously worked for the IT department of a national parcel delivery service. John joins us from IT Services at the University of Manchester where he was Head of Client Services. We wish them both well in their new roles with us.

Finally, we say goodbye to Steve Collinson of the IT Support Office, who is leaving us in March to take up a post at the University of Lancaster. We wish him success both in his new job, and in his impending role as a new father.

TOM BORGIA

JOHN GRANNAN

Comments Cards in PC Classrooms and Study Areas

AIMEE PHILLIPS

In September 2008, we introduced comments cards into our PC classrooms and study areas. Users completing the cards are encouraged to submit a comment, compliment or complaint. A large amount of useful feedback has been gathered, with over 80 cards filled out so far. We have been encouraged to see compliments such as "Good number of computers, fast easy access to the internet, and areas to sit down. Good stuff", and "the new My IT Account website is really good, and being able to top up print credits online is great!"

We have also received suggestions for improvements, all of which we have considered carefully, and replied directly to the user where appropriate. Many of the comments can be grouped into a number of themes:

Printing

Around 35% of the comments we have received are about the classroom printing service. While some people are happy with the service, several points have been raised which we are investigating. In particular, as a direct result of the comments we have received, we are working to reduce the delay between print jobs. We are also reviewing the provision of duplex and A3 printing; for more details of the review of the printing system, please see Brian Souter's article on page 3.

Comments were received on the length of time it takes for the printers to warm up from standby mode. This is a case of maintaining a balance - the printers go into standby mode to save energy. We have now increased the length of inactive time before they go into standby.

Requests have been made for cheaper printing, but unfortunately this is not possible with current resources. Printing is already subsidised, and there are several costs to take into account, eg paper, toner, printer depreciation, and support. In addition, consideration is given to the environmental impact of reducing the costs.

PC performance

We have received several comments about the general performance of our PCs, in particular the length of time it takes to log on. We believe there are two issues here - one with booting up the machine, and one with the time it takes to load up a user's profile once they have logged on. These are both being investigated, and steps have already been taken to speed up both processes.

Software

Most comments relating to software are from users requesting an alternative web browser, particularly Firefox. For more information on the rollout of Firefox, see Adrian Young's article on this page. We have also received requests for Microsoft Office 2007. Amanda Bacon talks about the Office 2007 plans on page 6.

Environmental issues

We have been complimented on our environmental efforts, in particular our decision to automatically turn off PCs overnight and during vacations. Some users have commented that they'd like to see more paper recycling bins in the classrooms - bins are now available next to each of our printers.

At present, if a user tries to print when they don't have enough credit, an error sheet is printed to inform them of this. Users feel that this is a waste of paper, and would prefer that this message is displayed on the printer terminal instead. This option will be considered in the printing review mentioned above.

More details of the comments received, along with the Computing Service's response to them, are available at: **www.york.ac.uk/services/cserv/feedback/**.

Firefox via MS Softgrid

PRITPAL REHAL AND ADRIAN YOUNG

After a very successful trial of Firefox via MS Application Virtualisation (previously known as Softgrid) in the Langwith study area L/050 during the Autumn term 2008, we have decided to extend the rollout to the rest of the supported PCs on campus - both classroom and office machines.

Initially, the Softgrid client will be installed on the remaining Computing Service Classroom PCs during the summer vacation. Once this is completed, Firefox will be available through **Start|All Programs| Web Browsers**.

Availability on supported Windows XP Office PCs will follow soon afterwards.

Using virtualised applications has lots of benefits for both our users and Computing Service. These include:

. More choice and flexibility of the applications we can provide.
We are now able to provide Firefox on supported PCs, when previously this would be a difficult application to deploy and maintain using traditional methods.

. Better maintenance and support of the application.
As the application isn't installed on the PC itself, there aren't any conflicts with other applications so its deployment should be more stable.

. Quick deployment and upgrades of applications.
We can update Firefox with the latest patch and make the newly patched version available to everyone in around 40 minutes. By contrast, this would take several days with current deployment methods.

Not all applications can be virtualised but it is hoped we can look to provide other applications via Softgrid in the future to complement our existing deployment methods. Some applications we have already tested are: Second Life, SPSS and VLC (an open source media player), with more no doubt to follow.

Microsoft Compute Cluster – a Trial Service

ROB FLETCHER AND PRITPAL REHAL

In order to make extra and significant processing power available to research staff and graduates across all disciplines, we are creating a Microsoft Compute Cluster. Users will be able to run their jobs on this cluster, which will have significantly more power than a standard desktop, with the added advantage that the desktop machine is then still available for other tasks.

We decided to implement the Microsoft system (layered on top of Windows Server 2008) so that the majority of users will be able to use the system without having to learn a new operating system, just a slightly different way of working. The system will be able to run programs designed for the Microsoft operating system, but will be limited to a small number of application in the first instance.

We have bought a 16 node licence for the Matlab Distributed Computing Server along with 5 Parallel Toolboxes (which must be used in order to submit jobs to the cluster). Users will be able to submit their Matlab jobs from their own client computers, having first developed some degree of parallelism in their programs using the new toolbox. All other toolboxes are automatically available and licenced once a job is running on the cluster. Significant improvements in performance will be expected when up to 16 cores are being used to perform the calculations. Advantage could also be gained by using the 64-bit processing, even if the Matlab program does not have significant parallel elements.

Alternatively, users will be able to run interactive Matlab sessions on their desktops but off-load some the processing to the cluster without blocking/stalling their session.

Some of the additional toolboxes have parallel code in-built and a user only needs to switch this code on and the toolbox is able to take advantage of the multiple processing nodes. The Optimization Toolbox is a good example, and it means that anyone who uses this toolbox in their research could see very significant gains with only a small change to their Matlab program.

We will be inviting Mathworks (Matlab) to visit York and give an overview and demonstration of the capabilities of such a system.

Initially the system will be four 64-bit dual processor, quadcore systems, each with 16 gigabytes of memory (making 32 processing cores overall). If the trial service is deemed a success, then it will be rolled out as a full service later in the year.

Any users who believe that they could take advantage of this system are encouraged to contact Rob Fletcher (rpf1, 3816) or Pritpal Rehal (psr500, 3597) so they can be contacted once the system is available.

eProcurement Project Update

NICOLA NORMANDALE

The eProcurement project team are now working with Science Warehouse with a view to eventually doing all requisitioning and ordering through their system. Science Warehouse currently has over a hundred suppliers with full catalogues on their system, allowing you to search for products and compare prices across the different suppliers. We can also use their system for ordering from all other suppliers, where it provides a user friendly interface. People who simply need to order goods will no longer need to use Agresso at all. However, details of all orders raised will be passed to Agresso for the purposes of commitment accounting. In the long term, we will also be looking at using Science Warehouse for processing and matching of invoices as well.

Summer Desktop Applications Upgrade Programme

ADRIAN YOUNG

It's that time again when we start to plan which applications we want to upgrade and which new ones we want to add to our supported desktops.

To request an upgrade or a new application for inclusion in this year's programme please fill in the form at **www.york.ac.uk/services/cserv/sw/upgrade/request.htm**.

All requests should be submitted by 17.00 on Friday 1 May.

Some of the applications already being considered for upgrade/installation are:

. Internet Explorer 8

. Office 2007

. Mathematica 7

. SPSS 17

. Sigmaplot 11

. ArcGIS 9.3

. Endnote X2

We also want to remove some of the older and unused applications that are currently available on supported classroom PCs; we have collated a list of applications that appear not to have been used in the past year or more. This list can be found at **www.york.ac.uk/services/cserv/sw/upgrade/removal.htm**.

If you believe any of the applications in the list are still used then please contact Adrian Young (ary500@york.ac.uk). Any applications that have been identified as being obsolete will be removed and not installed on the classrooms during the classroom refresh programme. We have no plans at the moment to remove these programs from supported Office PCs.

Please be aware that we may not be able to fulfill requests for upgrades or installations, or to retain a piece of software, received after 1 May.

05

Enhancing the Student Accommodation System

KEVIN GARDNER

A major project is underway to upgrade and enhance the Student Accommodation system (Occam Systems' PAMS). The new modules and functionality will support online applications for bedrooms.

The current paper based system of applying for accommodation is time consuming for the staff involved, and inconvenient and slow from a student perspective. Implementing online applications is the penultimate step to achieving a fully online process for new students; all other steps of the enrolment process are done online via e:Vision.

The e-Business suite will provide the online application functionality and integrate directly with PAMS. The process will be closely integrated with e:Vision system and the finance system, Agresso.

The advantages from a student perspective include a faster application turn around time and improved communications including application status tracking. In addition, the task of applying for accommodation will just be another option from e:Vision, improving the perception of a joined up process. From a staff perspective, the data entry and processing of applications will be reduced, and the room allocation process streamlined. This will allow the team to focus on improving communications and support. Another benefit of the online process will be a cost saving on paper and mailing charges. The hardware behind this e-Business suite is based on a twin-tier WEB and WEB Services layer which is running Windows on VMWare.

Dovetailing with the introduction of this new suite, is an upgrade to the existing PAMS system which involves migrating all components to new hardware. The database is migrating from Oracle9i on a single stand alone host, to Oracle 11g on our resilient Blade platform. The Oracle AS layer is migrating from a single host to our VMware platform.

The system will be used by the new undergraduates (09/10) during the summer 2009 enrolment. In 2010 it will be rolled out for all students.

Microsoft Office 2007

AMANDA BACON

The Computing Service is aiming to roll out Office 2007 for the academic year 2009/2010; it will be installed on classroom machines over the summer as part of the annual upgrade programme. Migration for staff will be phased, possibly on a departmental basis, and it is hoped that Departmental Computing Officers will be closely involved. We will be consulting with departments in the coming months - in the meantime if a department is interested in being an earlier adopter and prepared to take part in a pilot phase, please contact Amanda Bacon (agb12@york.ac.uk).

Office 2007 has a radically different interface to previous versions and the Office suite offers new functionality and applications. In preparation for migration and deployment to departments, the Service plans to deliver a series of lecture style introductory briefings. These will be supported by online materials in addition to the standard training programme. A web site is being developed to keep users informed as the project develops. This will provide links to information such as project timescales, system requirements, documentation, training and support, compatibility issues, etc. This can be found at: **www.york.ac.uk/services/cserv/sw/office2007**.

Cloud Burst - Rejection of Cloud Computing for York Email and Calendar EC3 PROJECT TEAM

As reported in Keynotes, October 2008, the Computing Service has been carrying out an extensive evaluation to consider whether cloud computing services offered by Google (Google Apps Education Edition) or Microsoft (Live@Edu ExchangeLabs) should be used to replace our existing central email and calendaring services for all staff and students. After extensive consultation, technical investigations and enquiries across the sector this project has now concluded and a report on its findings has been considered and accepted by Information Strategy Group. The recommendation was that cloud computing services should not be taken up for these purposes in the medium term. The main factors contributing to this decision were as follows:

Technical Immaturity - Whilst both products are based on mature and fast improving underlying services, important aspects are in flux and shortcomings remain.
Data Protection & Security - Independent legal advice commissioned for this project highlighted difficulties in guaranteeing compliance to data protection principles enshrined by the Data Protection Act 1998.
Institutional Risk - Difficulties in protecting the University from poor service (actual or perceived) either contractually or technically leaves open the possibility of operational damages and reputation loss.
Research Privacy - A number of senior researchers expressed fundamental objections towards external hosting of email by commercial providers, particularly where doing so risked infringement of non-disclosure arrangements required by sponsors.
Other Institutions - Whereas the vast majority of HE institutions adopting these services centrally have done so to support student services only, those sharing our objective that students and staff should use a common communications infrastructure (e.g. Oxford) have reached similar conclusions.

A full report describing methodologies and analyses in detail will be made available as soon as possible at: **www.york.ac.uk/taketotheclouds**.

It is now intended that a further project will evaluate a range of new or upgraded systems to be hosted internally for the delivery of improved email and calendaring services. In addition, the Computing Service and Web Office will draft guidelines highlighting data protection considerations and other issues surrounding use of cloud computing services for purposes other than those addressed here.

Computing Service Staff

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Name	Ext	Username	Name	Ext	Username
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Gavin Atkinson	3738	ga9	John Isles	4454	jdi500
Amanda Bacon	3802	agb12	Sarah Kennedy	3825	srk500
Linda Bailey	3800	lcb6	Anthony Leonard	4350	apbl500
Sue Bolton	2102	sjb28	Robert McCarthy	3594	rm575
Tom Borgia	4348	tb549	Fergus McGlynn	3822	fam6
David Broom	3229	dlb10	Tricia McNamara	3743	pm535
Mike Brudenell	3811	pmb1	John Marsden	3832	jpm1
John Byrne	3812	jcb1	John Mason	3813	jrm13
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Arthur Clune	3129	ajc22	Darren Munday	8469	dam6
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Steve Downes	3741	sd21	Pritpal Rehal	3597	psr500
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Paul Elliott	3807	pre500	Philip Smailes	3833	pjrs1
Ken Finch	4452	kf1	Andrew Smith	3809	abs4
Rob Fletcher	3816	rpf1	Brian Souter	3814	bs1
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IT Support Office

The IT Support Office is your first point of contact with the Computing Service

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e.   itsupport@york.ac.uk

Open from 09.00 to 17.00 Monday to Friday for problem solving, advice and information, fault reporting, network connections, file restoration, course bookings and user registration.

Contacting the Computing Service

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t.   01904 43 **3800**

dd. 01904 43 followed by ext nos
     beginning **2, 3 or 4.**
     01904 32 followed by ext nos
     beginning **8.**

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e.   username@york.ac.uk

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