



keynotes

The Computing Service Newsletter

vol.35:1 - October 2008

Cloud Computing:

Evaluating options for email, calendar and collaboration

Also in this issue:

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From the Editor

As a central service, it's important that we respond to user feedback, and evolve the facilities we offer to meet changing needs. On page 3 we introduce our new comments cards, designed to encourage feedback, and on page 4, we talk about some of the actions planned in response to the User Satisfaction Survey. Amongst the topics commonly raised by our users are a wish for more email features - for example, real name addresses, and for improved shared calendar provision.

On page 4, Anthony Leonard introduces the EC3 project which has been tasked with investigating whether we should turn to commercial suppliers to host our email and calendar provision.

As wireless access to the network continues to increase in popularity, we've made it easier for users to connect their laptops to eduroam - see page 6 for details, and look out for our new **Wireless Hotspot** signs.

Students often request alternative web browsers on our classroom PCs. In response to this, we are trialling the provision of Firefox in L/050. Turn to page 5 for details of how the software is being supplied to the desktop.

JOANNE CASEY

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Staff News MIKE JINKS

Firstly, we say farewell to Stevie de Saille, our Database Advisor, who has left the Computing Service to concentrate on her PhD at the University of Leeds - we wish her well in her studies. And we say temporary farewells and best wishes to Tamsyn Quormby, Heather Walker and Jenny Smailes who will each be leaving to begin their maternity leave shortly.

John Hawes has moved from his role as a Computing Assistant in the IT Support Office to take on the newly vacant role of Database Advisor.

Steve Collinson and John Campbell have both joined the IT Support Office as Computing Assistants. Steve has recently completed a degree in Computer Communications at Leeds Metropolitan University. When not at work he plays five-a-side football, visits the gym, and enjoys travelling. John was previously working for English Heritage in York, administering the Maintenance Helpdesk.

Robert Demaine has moved from his post as Head of Infrastructure to take up the newly created role of IT Infrastructure Consultant with responsibility for Strategic Projects - at the moment, work on the Heslington East project is his main focus. John Mason is currently Acting Head of Infrastructure, pending the post being advertised in the Autumn term.

We wish all our colleagues well in their new roles with us.



STEVE COLLINSON



JOHN CAMPBELL

Software Upgrade

ADRIAN YOUNG

This year saw another sizeable number of new and upgraded applications to be tackled as part of the application upgrade programme.

Regrettably some software could not be included in the upgrade programme due to licensing or compatibility problems.

The following applications were added to the classrooms and made available to supported office PCs.

- . **PDF Converter Pro 5.0** – Version upgrade (deployed in supported classrooms only)
- . **ArcGIS 9.2 SP6** – Patch upgrade
- . **Endnote 11.01** – Patch upgrade
- . **Paintshop Pro 12** – Version upgrade
- . **7-zip** – New application
- . **Sim Venture 3.41** – Patch upgrade
- . **SPSS 16** – Version Upgrade
- . **SPSS Legacy Viewer 15** – New application (needed to view previous versions documents)

- . **Matlab 2008a** – Version upgrade
- . **Transcriber 1.5.1** – Patch upgrade
- . **Audacity** – New application
- . **NX Client** – New application
- . **Omnipage 16** – Version upgrade
- . **Cygwin** – New application
- . **LearnBayes** – New application
- . **R2 WinBugs** – New application
- . **Boa Constructor** – New application
- . **Understanding Taxation** – New application
- . **MindGenius 2.423** – Patch upgrade
- . **Digital Doomsday** – Version Upgrade
- . **R 2.6.2** – Patch upgrade
- . **MySQL ODBC Connector 5.1** – Version upgrade
- . **Virtual Industry Visit** – New application
- . **Atlas.ti 5.2.18** – Patch upgrade
- . **SecureShare Access** – Patch upgrade

New and upgraded applications can be installed via Run Advertised Programs.

Increased Mail Quotas

DARREN MILLER

We are happy to announce a large increase to mail quotas. All users now have 200 Mb to store their email messages. Staff and Research Graduates with exceptional mail requirements who need more than 200 Mb may request additional space by contacting the IT Support Office.

If you wish to check what your current quota usage is, please visit the My IT Account webpage (www.york.ac.uk/myitaccount).

User Feedback

JOANNE CASEY

User feedback is a valuable means for us to gather the information we need to improve the Computing Service. With this in mind, we've provided comments cards in all Computing Service PC classrooms and study areas, and in the IT Support Office. Feedback by email (itsupport@york.ac.uk) is always welcome too.

Should York email and calendar take to the clouds? ANTHONY LEONARD

The Computing Service is actively considering whether to move central email and calendar provision for staff and students to services offered by either Google or Microsoft by the start of the 2009/10 academic year. The aim is to improve services and ease collaboration both within the University and beyond, as part of a drive to meet the University's changing IT needs over the next 5-10 years. The evaluation team are working closely with departments to ensure wide representation, and are planning a range of means by which staff and students can contribute.

What are the services being evaluated?

Both Google and Microsoft's offerings are examples of the so-called **cloud-computing** model, where traditionally in-house IT facilities are delivered instead as a service over the internet. Such services are typically hugely scalable, and add new features quickly and incrementally. The Computing Service would continue to manage account provisioning and handle user queries, however Google or Microsoft would host mailboxes and other data, and manage their software systems themselves.

Google Apps Education Edition offers a range of online tools and services managed primarily using its online suite of **Google Apps**. As well as **Email** and **Calendar**, these include **Docs** (rich text documents, presentations, spreadsheets), **Talk** (instant messaging), and **Sites** (web sites). Its strengths lie in promoting collaboration and sharing, as well as pure-web interfaces for global access.

Microsoft Live@Edu ExchangeLabs offers email and calendar services using externally hosted infrastructure based on its market-leading Exchange server technology. Windows Live services such as MSN Live (instant messaging) and "SkyDrive" (online personal file storage) are also available. Its strengths lie in integration with Microsoft desktop

software (such as Outlook) as well as mobile devices.

Email provision for universities is currently the scene of fierce competition between the internet giants. Whilst MS would charge the University per staff account, their student services, as well as all Google's offerings, are offered at no-fee. In neither case are advertisements used (excepting alumni accounts).

Will a change like this definitely happen?

No. Although the services offered by Google and Microsoft may be seen prima facie as being in line with University strategies over the medium term, only now are they being evaluated in depth from all perspectives. It is perfectly possible that, following their evaluation, such a move may not be recommended.

What would it mean for me?

Were either service implemented, it is hoped that all users would be able to use the same email address (ending @ **york.ac.uk**) and account password as previously. However, those primarily using centrally managed email and calendar might expect the following benefits:

- . **tens of gigabytes of mail quota**
- a 100-fold increase
- . **richer web interfaces**
- anytime anywhere
- . **use with mobile devices**
- available on the go
- . **"email for life" - student, staff, alumni...**

Potential downsides may depend on how you access your email and calendars currently - we are actively seeking this information (see "How can I contribute?" below). Some desktop email applications may integrate with the new services better than others, or require re-configuration at the point of migration. For many, introductory training on using the new systems may be required.

Would my emails and diary information be safe?

The Computing Service takes data protection very seriously. Ensuring adherence to the University's obligations under the Data Protection

Act 1997 is an important part of the ongoing evaluation.

How can I contribute?

Your contribution is crucial in ensuring that our requirements gathering and evaluation processes properly reflect wide-ranging needs across University. Questionnaires for students and staff are planned, as well as open events during which the services could be demonstrated. Throughout, it is hoped that departmental computing officers (DCOs) will be closely involved. For more information please visit the web site below. Alternatively contact your DCO or Anthony Leonard (Project Manager) directly (apbl500@york.ac.uk, x4350).

www.york.ac.uk/taketotheclouds

User Satisfaction Survey

JOANNE CASEY

As reported in the last issue of Keynotes, we have been carrying out a detailed analysis of the User Satisfaction Survey. The consequent report can be accessed at: www.york.ac.uk/services/cserv/offdocs/.

Actions which are already planned or underway in response to the results of the survey include:

- . **Provision of more wireless access points**
- . **Creating areas with network access facilities where students can work in groups**
- . **Providing more PCs in the library**
- . **Provision of alternative web browsers (see page 5)**
- . **Increasing mail quotas (see page 3)**

Many issues which users identified as key concerns are already being investigated. These include:

- . **Replacing Sun One Calendar with another shared calendar service (see left)**
- . **Providing more filestore**
- . **Improving off-campus access to software**

Firefox trial using MS Softgrid

ADRIAN YOUNG AND PRITPAL REHAL

During the Autumn Term we are running a trial in L/050 of Firefox V3 as a virtualised application using Microsoft Softgrid (soon to be renamed MS Application Virtualisation or MS App-V for short).

Softgrid works very differently to our traditional methods of software deployment and streams the applications to a PC from a central server. The application then runs inside a virtualised 'bubble' on the PC, using the PC's resources, memory, graphics, etc but not actually installing anything on the PC.

The bubble runs the application in its own environment but can interact with the PC for things like printing and saving data. It can also interact with installed applications on the PC, for Firefox this includes media players like Apple's Quicktime and Adobe's Flash and Shockwave plugins.

Running Firefox as a virtualised application gives us many advantages over deploying and installing it in the traditional manner. The main advantage is that we don't have the overhead of managing and supporting two web browsers on all the supported PCs. We can offer the choice and features of an alternative browser without the issues of trying to keep two browsers up to date and secure.

We only have to update the central files of Firefox when new patches are available and new versions can be instantly available to PCs as soon as we have finished the upgrade. This means any security flaws can be fixed very quickly which reduces the risk of exposure we may be open to.

Another advantage is we can have multiple versions of an application running on a PC at the same time because they aren't actually installed and so there are no conflicts or incompatibilities to deal with.

EARL - Easy Access to Resource Lists FERGUS MCGLYNN

The Library and the Computing Service have designed and developed a new system for managing course resource lists online. Resource lists are like reading lists, except they can contain sound recordings, films, web sites and other media as well as books, chapters, journals and journal articles. The system is called "EARL", which stands for Easy Access to Resource Lists. It replaces an application called "Sentient Discover" which was formerly used for this purpose, but didn't meet all the needs of lecturers, students and library staff.

EARL is available as a building block in Blackboard, the University's Virtual Learning Environment. In the VLE, course instructors can add EARL as a tool for their course. They can then create resource lists for that course, and add resources to these lists by simply filling in web forms.

EARL is integrated with the University of York Library Catalogue. This allows course instructors to search the UoY Library Catalogue from within EARL, and add items from the University of York Library Catalogue to resource lists with the click of a button. They can also search and add resources from COPAC (the merged online catalogues of major University and National Libraries in the UK and Ireland, including the British Library) from within EARL, or add resources manually. The system allows course instructors to add e-journals and e-journal articles to their resource lists as well.

Using the VLE, students can view the resource lists for the courses on which they are enrolled. Any resources that are available online (such as web sites or e-journals) are presented with a link directly to the resource. Resources from the University of York Library Catalogue are presented with a link directly to the resource in the Library Catalogue. From there, students can find out more information about the resource, check its location and availability, and place a request on the resource.

The system provides library staff with reports detailing which resources have been added to resource lists, the dates for which resource lists are active, and whether or not the resources are to be considered "key text". This information is used in the process of ordering resources and in moving items to and from the key text section of the library.

EARL was developed during the Spring Term earlier this year. It was tested by a group of academics, students and library staff during the Summer Term, and is now available to all course instructors in the VLE. For more information, please contact Sue Elphinstone in the Library (se9@york.ac.uk).

New Style Training Courses SUSANNE HODGES

Over the summer, the IT Training Office received funding to develop teacher-led training courses. This means that, rather than the 'work through the workbook and put your hand up if you get stuck' approach, course participants are taught from the front as a group and encouraged to work together and to help each other. This method of training takes far longer than our normal way of teaching and is most effective with small groups.

A two day Word course was recently piloted with ten staff from Electronics. The group really enjoyed this style of teaching and found it most effective. We plan to run Excel courses with the same group over the coming academic year.

Meanwhile, the new style Word course will be broken down into ten or more one hour lunchtime sessions and offered to all University staff. The courses will be advertised at: www.york.ac.uk/services/cserv/training/timetable.htm during the Autumn Term.

SNS No More BEN THOMPSON AND ELEANOR COULTISH

The Student Network Service (SNS) that provides network connectivity in study bedrooms is now known as Network Access Service (NAS). For some time now the network sockets in study bedrooms operate in the same way as other open access sockets (NAS ports) that we have around Campus, for example in the Library and Physics concourse. This means that students, conference guests and visitors to the University who have a valid username and password can connect to the network without reconfiguring their computer at each location. To use the NAS, connect your computer to the network, open a web browser and follow the on-screen instructions on the NAS setup page (which should appear when you access an off-site webpage).

For more information, or to see the manual setup instructions, visit www.york.ac.uk/services/cserv/net/nas/.

Wireless Update BEN THOMPSON AND ELEANOR COULTISH

We now have around 150 wireless access points providing wireless cover on both Heslington Campus and the King's Manor. As the demand for wireless networking has increased we've been looking at ways to make the initial setup procedure easier rather than users having to work through long tedious setup guides. This has been done using the idEngines AutoConnect software that automatically configures Windows and OSX machines and migrates them across to use the secure network **eduroam**. To use the automatic setup you need to carry out the following 3 steps:

- . **Connect to the NAS ssid (unsecured).**
- . **Open a web browser, go to <http://autoconnect.york.ac.uk>, and then click Start.**
- . **Follow the on-screen instructions, entering your username and password when prompted.**

Once the setup program has finished you should be connected to eduroam. The computer should now connect to eduroam automatically when it is in a WiFi area of the University - watch out for our new Wireless Hotspot signage.

Manual setup guides (including other operating systems) are still available at www.york.ac.uk/go/wireless.

Hardware Support KEN FINCH

The Southern/Northern Higher Education Institutions Hardware Support Schemes comes up for renewal every 5 years. This year all third party hardware support suppliers had to re-submit their bids. As a result of this, Xenon, our preferred supplier, have reduced their prices. For example PCs and black & white laser printers can now be covered for 12 months at a cost of £18 plus VAT. A full list of the new price charging will be provided on our maintenance web pages (www.york.ac.uk/services/cserv/purchase/purchase.yrk/maintenance/).

Web Office Staff News PAUL KELLY

Amanda Owen joined the Web Office in August, as Web Training and Support Officer. Amanda will be heavily involved in helping departments migrate their websites into the new Web Content Management System. Amanda joins us from Norwich Union.

PC Classrooms and Study Areas BRIAN SOUTER

The programme of works to maintain and upgrade classroom PCs all went according to schedule over the summer. A total of 149 new PCs were installed, replacing PCs in G/022, A/EW/004 and the Morrell Library. The new PCs have Intel Dual Core processors, 4GB memory, LCD screens, DVD-W/CD-RW drives, USB 2.0 Multi-Card Readers and accessible USB and audio ports.

By arrangement with the Library, we have increased the number of PCs in the first floor study area from 14 to 24, replaced six old PCs in the first floor extension and installed four new PCs in the ground floor Audio Visual room. The Computing Service now manages a total of 63 PCs in the Library across five locations: R/002 (25), R/033 (4), R/133 (24), R/142 (6) and HRL/112 (4).

The printer in G/169 has been relocated to the first floor of the Library to support the increase in the numbers of PCs; the ground floor printer in the Library is very heavily used according to our statistics. Conversely, the G/169 printer was the most under-utilised on campus and notices have been placed directing users to the ground floor printer in G/022.

Christmas Closure BRIAN SOUTER

It seems a little early to be mentioning Christmas but this is our last issue of 2008. So, please note that the Computing Service will close at 12.30 on Wednesday 24 December and reopen at 09.00 on Friday 2 January.

During the closure, all services will be available as usual outside normal hours; no staff will be on duty to attend to faults, and access to classroom PCs will be subject to college opening hours.

To save energy, classroom PCs which are regularly shutdown each evening are not restarted automatically outside term; users will need to switch them on as required.

Computing Service Staff

Director.	Mike Jinks	3801	kmj1
Departmental Administrator.	Lorraine Moor	3801	lsm1
Acting Head of Infrastructure.	John Mason	3813	jrm13
Head of Information Systems.	Kay Mills-Hicks	2101	kmh8
Head of Support Services.	David Surtees	3803	dps4
Information Officer.	Joanne Casey	3805	jmc8

Kashif Amin	3817	ka14	John Hutchinson	3898	jh57
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
David Broom	3229	dlb10	Fergus McGlynn	3822	fam6
Mike Brudenell	3811	pmb1	John Marsden	3832	jpm1
John Byrne	3812	jcb1	Darren Miller	3815	dm26
John Campbell	4347	jac523	Darren Munday	8469	dam6
Arthur Clune	3129	ajc22	Nicola Normandale	4695	ncn1
Steve Collinson	3810	smc513	Aimee Phillips	3897	amp11
John Cooper	3595	jmc508	Tamsyn Quormby	4346	tq1
Eleanor Coultish	8467	emm502	Pritpal Rehal	3597	psr500
Robert Demaine	3808	rld1	Sam Scott	3817	svs2
Steve Downes	3741	sd21	Jenny Smailes	4455	jj5
Mike Dunn	3819	md24	Philip Smailes	3833	pjrs1
Paul Elliott	3807	pre500	Andrew Smith	3809	abs4
Ken Finch	4452	kf1	Brian Souter	3814	bs1
Rob Fletcher	3816	rpf1	Max Spicer	3745	mjs510
Iain Ford	3894	igf500	Richard Stoddart	4349	rjs502
Kevin Gardner	3739	pkg4	Carl Stovell	4699	cjs505
Chris Gowland	3823	cg1	Ben Thompson	8401	bt4
Kelvin Hai	4689	kh525	Pete Turnbull	3804	pnt1
Sarah Hall	3827	seh11	Sam Vines	3749	sccv1
Peter Halls	3806	pjh1	Heather Walker	3743	hp501
John Hawes	3818	jeh11	Michael Walters	2627	mjw513
Susanne Hodges	3839	sh32	Adrian Young	3820	ary500
Geoff Houlton	2100	gph2			

IT Support Office

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

- t. 01904 43 3838
- 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

Computing Service
University of York, Heslington
York. YO10 5DD

- t. 01904 43 3800
- dd. 01904 43 followed by ext nos beginning 2, 3 or 4.
01904 32 followed by ext nos beginning 8.
- f. 01904 43 3740
- e. username@york.ac.uk
- w. www.york.ac.uk/services/cserv/

keynotes

Computing Service

University of York,
Heslington,
York, YO10 5DD

t. 01904 43 3838
e. itsupport@york.ac.uk

www.york.ac.uk/services/cserv/