# key*notes*

# Purchasing News

# key*notes*

## contents

## From the Editor

New century, new purchasing arrangements! Turn to page 3 for Doug Moncur's article on recent and future changes to the purchasing of software and hardware.

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Kay Robinson writes on page 4 about the development of YIMS, a University wide initiative involving the selection and implementation of new software to replace the MAC information and management system.

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On behalf of the Computing Service, may I wish you all a very Happy New Year.

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*Joanne Casey*

## Reference Manager
*John Illingworth*

The Reference Manager bibliographic software package, obtained after an evaluation process triggered by an initiative from Computing Committee, is now available on the PC system. Unfortunately due to staff shortage it will not be possible to provide support or training on this product immediately; it will not be available until the Summer Term at the earliest. However, we believe that enough people will wish to work it out for themselves to make it worthwhile installing the product with system support, but without user support.

A reminder; system support means that we install the software, make it work, add fixes and patches that are distributed to us, and install updated versions as and when they appear. User support means that we know how it works and what it does and can help you with any difficulties you might have in using the software, and can provide training. This gives us four possible levels of support and there are examples of each on the central systems.

## Software Snapshot
*John Illingworth*

The Software Snapshot was updated in November. This details the state of the applications software offerings on both PC and Unix systems in late November 1999 and may be found on YorkWeb under **Computing Service | Software**, or at *http://www.york.ac.uk/services/ cserv/sw/swibw02.htm*

The Snapshot gives details of support levels and version of all the software, plus short descriptions of what each item does and where we think it's headed.

## Staff News
*Mike Jinks*

Two members of staff have recently left the Computing Service.

Helen Parker formed the 'afternoon shift' of a job-share of secretarial staff, working particularly for the Deputy Director and helping to ensure the smooth administration of the Service. After four years in this role, she is moving on. We will miss her positive approach and hope to continue to see her around the University.

Bob Marriott has worked for us on a JISC contract to develop the provision of management information from databases via a web interface and has produced a demonstrator system for student admissions which is being trailed in the University this year. The experience from this project will be made available to other Universities as part of the JISC contract. Bob continues to live in the area in his new post and we wish him all the best for the future.

## Virtual Learning
*Debra Fayter*

Many departments at York are becoming interested in providing courses by distance learning and are looking to harness the potential of information technology to enhance these programmes. In response the Computing Service has set up a project to look into a product called WebCT which aims to provide a whole virtual learning environment. Designed by the University of British Columbia, WebCT is in use at many universities across several countries and is thought to be the front runner in the new field of virtual learning. It allows for provision of Web-based teaching materials and for extensive communication amongst students, and between lecturers and students, whatever their physical distance. It includes bulletin boards, whiteboard presentations, chat rooms, self assessment and testing tools, email, calendar facilities and so on.

The WebCT project aims to decide if this product should be provided as a central service and, if so, to define the resource implications. During January and February, subject to successful installation of a test system, we will be looking for prospective users to try out the software. By the end of April a decision will be made on whether Computing Service should provide a WebCT service and at what level. If the decision is positive WebCT will be installed for October 2000.

Information about WebCT is available at *http:// www.webct.com*. In the meantime please contact Debra Fayter (email daf3, tel 3839) if you are interested in trialing this software.

news in brief

# Information Desk Usage
## *Joanne Casey*

The Information Desk has continued to be very busy; over the six month period from June to November, it dealt with a total of 18180 transactions. There was a sizeable peak in October - during this time, in addition to telephone and email enquiries, there was one visit to the Desk every four and a half minutes.

Popular enquiries included:

- can I access the network/ mail from my home PC?
- how do I use the PC classrooms?
- how can I retrieve files I deleted by accident?
- can you log me out of MAC?
- can I extend my account?
- how do I print?
- can I buy software here for my home PC ?
- how do I open email attachments?
- can I register on one of your courses?
- what do I do when my M: drive is full?

Further details of the type of transactions, and the figures for each month are shown in the charts below.



**Information Desk Usage**
By Enquiry Type and Month
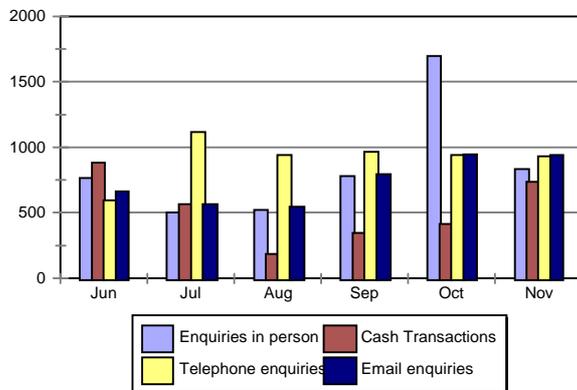


**Average Daily Number of Transactions**
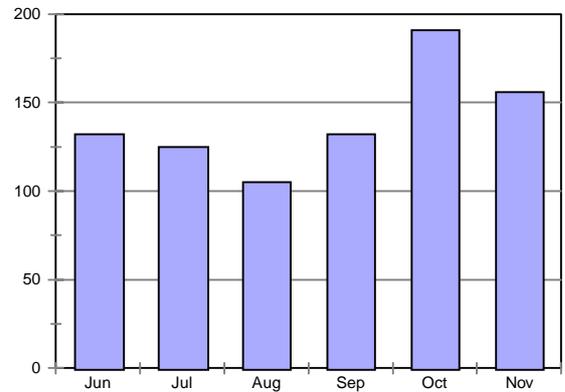


**Total Transactions**
Breakdown by Enquiry Type



**Total Transactions**

## Bundles of Joy:
## Special Offers from Viglen and Dan
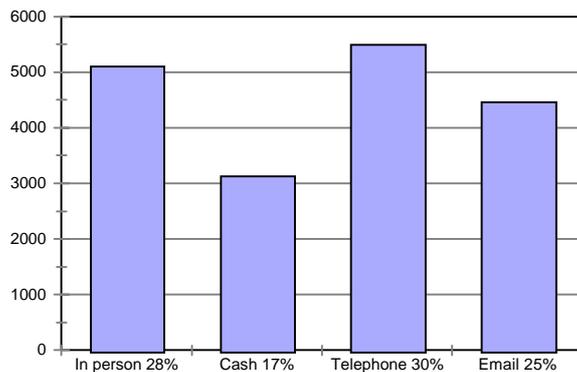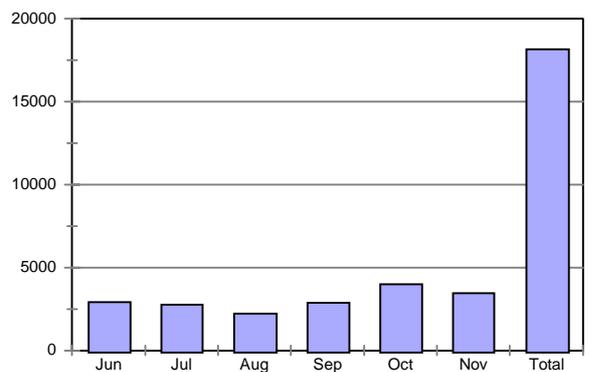### *Doug Moncur*

Some things in life always seem more complicated than they should be. Buying computers is one of them, as it's often difficult to navigate your way through the maze of options to specify a system which is suitable for use on the campus network and is reasonably future proof.

To simplify matters we've been working with two of our preferred suppliers, Viglen and Dan, to put together a range of machines specified for use on the campus network with a suitable ethercard , memory and hard disk specification. Both sets of machines have soundcards and speakers - the Viglen machines include a multimedia monitor that incorporates the speakers.

Both manufacturers provide options for 128Mb RAM in place of 64Mb, and for a 13Gb disk in place of an 8Gb disk. At present we don't have an option for 17" monitors, but hope to have one in place for early in 2000.

The prices for the bundles already include all available discounts. They are slightly more keenly priced than the equivalent system specified individually. However if you have more precise needs you can still fully specify and order an individual configuration.

The bundle prices and specifications are reviewed monthly. To check on the offers available access *http://www.york.ac.uk/services/cserv/purchase/purchase.yrk/links.htm* and follow the "Special Offers" links for Viglen and Dan.

## Desktop PCs
### *Doug Moncur*

The University's preferred supplier agreement for desktop PCs with Dan, Viglen, and Acer will expire on 1 December 2000.

As a consequence of various EU directives designed to ensure that competition takes place as regards the selection of suppliers, the University is obliged to carry out a formal tendering process. The tender will be advertised in the Official Journal of the European Communities (OJEC) sometime in February 2000. There are various milestones built into the process but we would hope to have a shortlist of suppliers by June 2000. While negotiations will be taking place over the summer, we hope to be able to indicate to departments whether any particular supplier is likely to be re-appointed by early August (in time for the summer equipment grant round). It is unlikely there would be a formal announcement of the new suppliers before the start of the Autumn term.

The new agreement will be for a period of two years with an option to extend for a further year; arrangements will be agreed by both Information Committee and Purchasing Committee.

## Change of Laptop Suppliers
### *Doug Moncur*

On 1 December our current preferred supplier's agreement for the supply of laptop computers expired. Rather than renegotiate our own agreement, Information Committee has agreed that we will make use of the national laptop supply agreement negotiated by the London Universities Purchasing Consortium (LUPC). The terms are almost identical to the existing agreement, with the major differences being that we can now offer laptops from Ergo and Viglen is no longer a preferred laptop supplier.

The new arrangements can be summarised thus:

**Toshiba** – you can still order from XMA *(www.xma.co.uk)* as before, and you may also order Toshiba laptops from Getech (*www.getech.co.uk*)

**Acer** – these are now available through Getech (*www.getech.co.uk*) rather than Phoenix

**Ergo** – laptops may be ordered from Ergo (*www.ergo.co.uk*)

**Viglen** – Although no longer a preferred laptop supplier, you may continue to buy their laptops under our usual terms if, for example, your department has standardised on Viglen laptops for at least the next 12 months.

As always the Computing Service is happy to order laptops on behalf of departments; the normal £25 order administration fee will apply.

**purchasing**

# York Information Management and Systems - YIMS
*Kay Robinson*

All staff have recently received a University Briefing Note concerning the commencement of a major new University project known as YIMS. The Computing Service will be playing a key role in this project over the coming years.

The aim of the project is to introduce new information management systems to the University in support of key activities undertaken in both the central administration and the academic departments. This project will include the selection and implementation of new software to replace the MAC system.

## Steering Group

Bearing in mind the experience with the implementation of the MAC system at York, it was decided that it was essential to establish a Steering Group at a senior level right at the start of the project. The Steering Group will drive the process of specifying, procuring and implementing the new systems. It will also be responsible for securing the necessary financial resources from the Policy and Resources Committee.

## User involvement

Although the membership of the Steering Group is at a senior level, a number of sub-groups will be formed to carry out the detailed specification and implementation work. There will probably be one sub-group for each of the main areas:

Finance (including research, stores, purchase ordering and inventory management)

Students (including admissions, course record, student record)

Personnel and Payroll

Facilities Management (including room bookings and space management)

Members of staff will be expected to participate fully in the work of the sub-groups to ensure that the needs of all users are taken in to account. Because there are so many staff who use the systems and who would like to put forward their views, it will not be possible for everyone to be a member of one of the sub-groups. Other activities, such as questionnaires, focus groups, open meetings etc. will take place to ensure that everyone has their say.

## Progress to date

The YIMS project has already secured support for the appointment of a "Programme Manager" to carry out the day-to-day management of the project, including liaison and communication with University staff. In addition a web site containing all the latest information has been set up at: *http://www.york.ac.uk/univ/org/ yims/local.yrk/.*

As a first step the University has appointed a consultant, Dr Mark Cartwright, to carry out a high level overview of key administrative processes and to consider how new technology can be utilised to ensure execution as efficiently as possible. He will be presenting his report in January 2000. Following his work, a strategy and project plan will be constructed so that more detailed activities can be commenced in the appropriate areas.

Work on the introduction of new personnel and payroll systems is expected to commence in the New Year. These modules of the MAC system have become increasingly unreliable during the past year or so, particularly payroll. They are also the modules which are in greatest danger of becoming unsupported by the systems suppliers. The process of selecting and implementing the new software is expected to take at least one year. It is not an easy undertaking, the new systems will be very expensive, so it is important to get it right.

## Technology

The implementation of new systems offers a tremendous opportunity to take advantage of the latest technologies. Most commercial finance systems and human resources systems now have web interfaces which offer the opportunity of "self-service" for some areas, e.g. viewing account details on-line or updating personal details via a web form. Facilities Management software also has web capabilities such as on-line room booking or viewing a CAD drawing via the web. Other universities in the UK and overseas are implementing student record systems with web interfaces giving students access to parts of the student record to update certain details, such as term-time address. New systems also have very powerful data reporting facilities built into the package.

## Potential benefits

As we go through the process of selecting and implementing new systems, it will be very important for us to think about new ways of working, not just to think about automating or improving what we do now. There are a number

**(continued)**

of potential benefits which we should be seeking:

- easier to use
- suitable for use by occasional and regular users
- greater efficiency
- more flexibility
- improved data quality and integrity
- generate more income
- competitive advantage

**Some final thoughts**

YIMS is a University project, not a Computing Service project. It is vital that all staff participate fully in the process of selecting and implementing the new systems.

The new information management systems are not just for the central administration, they are for all activities in all University departments.

Don't wait to be asked for your views. Ensure that you bookmark the YIMS web page and keep up-to-date with the progress of the project. Comments can be emailed to me (*kr7@york.ac.uk*) or to the YIMS project group (*yims@york.ac.uk*)

# MAC Users - Keeping the Account Tidy
## *Sue Bolton*

Over time, as you use your MAC account to run reports and jobs in the MAC system, a number of LOG files and other "working files" are created. You will not always be aware of their creation - but it is important that you routinely check to see if there are any temporary work files in your account area, as they can consume large amounts of disk space. The sorts of things that create working files are the jobs submitted to the "batch queue" which runs overnight. Batch jobs create log files with names like U1234567.LOG. Also, reports produced by the 99;York reports option may produce working files with names like ST1234.TXT. There is a very easy to use facility which enables you to check whether there are any 'working files' in your area and to delete them. We recommend that all MAC users carry out this 'clear down' at least once a month. From a menu in MAC:

1. Enter 99;york in the action box.
2. Enter the Common Facilities option.
3. Choose View User Files from the menu.
4. Choose which file type you want to check and tidy up eg

LOG, TXT, SUBFILE, LIS or TMP. You are most likely to want to delete LOG and TXT files.

5. Before deleting any files it is advisable to list them all first. Choose option L to do this. A list of filenames with their creation dates will display on your screen.
6. You could choose to view the contents of a certain file by entering option V at this stage.
7. You could choose to print and delete all the files listed by entering option P. The files will be deleted after printing by choosing this option.
8. If you want to delete all the files listed and you do not require printouts of each one, then choose option D. A list of the files deleted will be displayed on your screen.
9. To delete files since a certain date enter option B. You will be prompted for a date. All files of the type you selected eg .TXT and created before the entered date will be deleted. A list of the files deleted will be displayed on your screen.
10. Follow the options to exit from each sub-menu and then PF4 to exit from the Common Facilities menu.

# ILIAD for the Workplace 2000
## *Susanne Hodges*

In Spring and Summer terms 1999 we piloted what turned out to be a highly successful programme that aimed to develop student information handling skills in the workplace. The pilot was delivered free of charge, pump-primed by North Yorkshire Training and Enterprise Council. Building upon the popularity of last year's project, we are now preparing to deliver an extended programme, both in terms of numbers and variety of courses.

In Spring 2000 we are planning to run two Office Skills courses, two Design of Web Page courses, two Desk Top Publishing courses and a Database Systems course. Each course will cater for 21 students and will run for two hours over five weeks. Each course carries a University-validated certificate, issued upon successful completion of an assessment, taken in the last session of each course. Last year, assessments produced work of a very high calibre, particularly in Design of Web Pages. Many students found that the skills acquired placed them significantly ahead in employment opportunities.

ILIAD for the Workplace will run in weeks 3 - 7 of Spring Term. To enrol on any of the courses outlined above, pick up a registration leaflet from Computing Classrooms, Computing Service Information Desk or from the ILIAD Office. Closing date for enrolment is 21 January 2000. For more information see: *http://www.york.ac.uk/services/cserv/training/iliad/forwork.htm.*

## New ColdFusion Service Available This Term
*John Byrne*

Since its launch in 1994 YorkWeb has become an important resource for publishing information, both to staff and students and to users from outside the University. It now hosts more than fourteen thousand pages which are maintained by over a hundred authors from all departments.

Although it is highly regarded as a well organised site, rich in content, it lacks certain facilities commonly found elswhere. In particular most pages are 'static' in the sense that they do not change until the page author amends them. In many cases this is just what is needed. However, there are times when it would be helpful to have added flexibility. For example, the University might wish to tailor course information to prospective students based on their preferences and expected qualifications. A course coordinator might like to have online feedback forms or tests, the results of which could be fed into a database and then processed without the work having to be done manually. Or a department may want to organise their news page so that items expire automatically once they are out of date. All of these applications use database technology. Web authors can use it to set up pages which will process information that the user submits through a form, creating or updating a database. Or they can use it to produce a 'dynamic' web page which changes depending on information users have given or requested.

Over the summer the Computing Service evaluated a number of products which could provide a database–web facility for web authors, eventually selecting a product called ColdFusion, which is well established in both the commercial and educational markets. The main criteria were that it should be fairly easy to create simple applications, but flexible enough for the more complex ones, and it should build on existing knowledge within the University.

ColdFusion works by running scripts which contain conventional HTML tags plus special tags which are interpreted by a ColdFusion server. In this sense the ColdFusion language is an extension to HTML. In fact a ColdFusion program could consist entirely of HTML (in which case it would be a static page). Here is a very simple example which displays the current date and time:

```
<html>
<head>
<title>time of day</title>
</head>
<body>
<h1>Time of Day</h1>
Hello the current date and time are:
<cfoutput>#now()#</cfoutput>
</body>
</html>
```

The new service will be launched in week 4 of this term and initially will be available to official web account holders. At the same time the Computing Service will be running an introductory ColdFusion course. The six sessions will cover basic database design and management, ColdFusion programming and integrating dynamic web pages into YorkWeb.

## Departmental Computing Officers' Forum
*Joanne Casey*

The recent inaugural meeting of the Departmental Computing Officers' Forum was well attended, by both newly-appointed DCOs and old hands, all very vocal! As a Service we were able not only to detail the DCOs with what we were able to offer but also to find out what they wanted from us and from the Forum itself. Needs expressed included more detailed training, access to the LAN database and a DCO's mailing list - the Computing Service is already working to meet these requests. The mailing list will allow the Computing Service to pass on vital information and will enable the DCOs to communicate with each other. It's also worth pointing out that DCOs should put procedures in place for their mail to be forwarded to someone else if they are absent for any length of time.

The Departmental Computing Officer is a vital link in the flow of information between the Computing Service and departments, so any departments that have not yet appointed one should do so as soon as possible, and pass the name to Lorraine Moor (*lsm1@york.ac.uk*).

A list of Departmental Computing Officers is available at *http://www.york.ac.uk/services/cserv/advice/depts/dcos.htm.*

Anyone wishing to work independently can be given the necessary information in time for the launch. In the meantime if you have any queries please contact John Byrne in the Computing Service (*jcb1@york.ac.uk*).
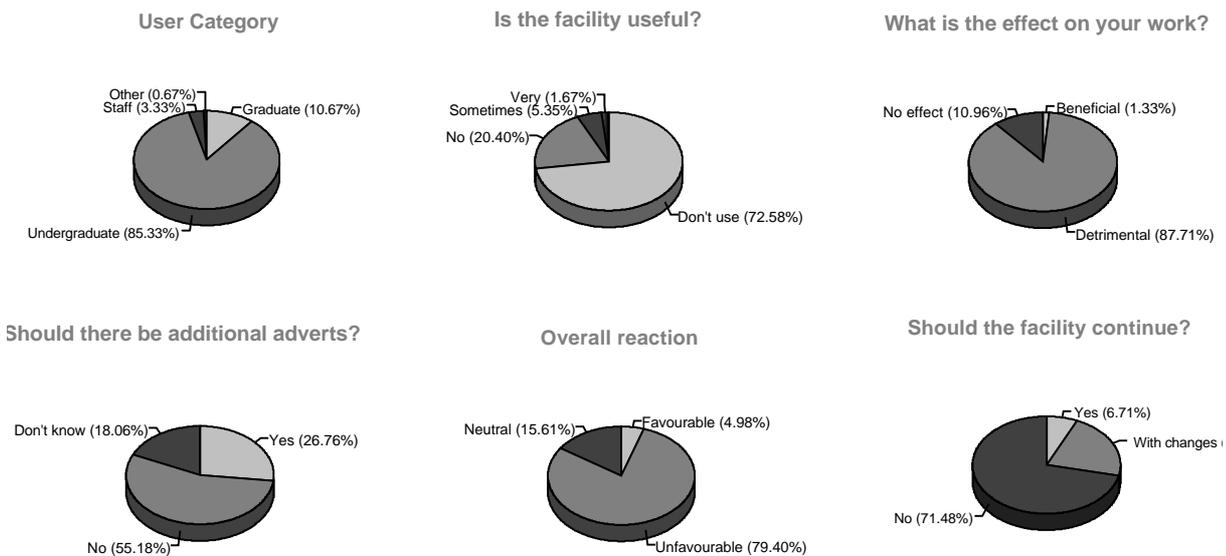
# Advertising on Classroom PCs
*Mike Jinks*

As reported in earlier issues of Keynotes, a trial of advertising has been running on around 200 classroom PCs throughout the summer and autumn terms. The Information Committee had agreed to this trial, specifying that the income generated should be deployed in upgrading PCs in the classrooms to ensure a direct benefit to the student community.

Originally the advertising consisted of an icon which covered up sections of the menu bar in Corel applications. Following feedback during the summer term, and in consultation with the Students Union, a revised system was agreed with Simply Internet to address the specific concerns, in which a 'bar' incorporating the icon would be set up either at the bottom or at the side of the screen. In addition, bodies such as the Students' Union had the opportunity to provide 'advertising' material on this bar, providing a link to their web pages. This system was trialed during the Autumn term.

The trial system incorporated a link to an explanation of the trial and a feedback form, in which basic information was collected, and users were able to make additional comments. This facility was highlighted on 'Message of the Day' and through newsgroups. 300 responses were received; the basic statistical results are as follows:

**User Category**
Other (0.67%)
Staff (3.33%)
Graduate (10.67%)
Undergraduate (85.33%)

**Is the facility useful?**
Very (1.67%)
Sometimes (5.35%)
No (20.40%)
Don't use (72.58%)

**What is the effect on your work?**
No effect (10.96%)
Beneficial (1.33%)
Detrimental (87.71%)

**Should there be additional adverts?**
Don't know (18.06%)
Yes (26.76%)
No (55.18%)

**Overall reaction**
Neutral (15.61%)
Favourable (4.98%)
Unfavourable (79.40%)

**Should the facility continue?**
Yes (6.71%)
With changes
No (71.48%)

Nearly all respondents submitted comments. Although some people were hostile to advertising *per se*, most people framed their comments in terms of the existing implementation which they generally found to be irritating and inconvenient. Many constructive proposals were made to improve the system.

The main irritations articulated by the students were:

* the size of the icon
* the fact that it was always 'on top'
* the distraction of the rapid rate of change (around 7 seconds) of the icon

These were all issues we raised with Simply Internet before the first trial and which they see as important features of the design.

In the light of the above feedback, Information Committee agreed that it would be unproductive to continue with the Simply Internet advertising system and it was discontinued when the contract expired at the end of 1999. In the longer term, the University's intranet proposals should provide a much more acceptable means of advertising.

## Computing Service Address

Computing Service
University of York
Heslington
YORK YO10 5DD

Telephone:    Switchboard (01904) 430000
              Direct dialling (01904) 43 followed by ext no.
Fax:          (01904) 433740
Email:        *username*@york.ac.uk

Also, try the World Wide Web: http://www.york.ac.uk/services/cserv/

## Information Desk

Telephone:    ext 3838
Email:        *infodesk*

The Information Desk is 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 conversion, sales, course bookings, registration and documentation.  Printed output can be collected from the lobby entrance which is open from 8am to midnight.

## Computing Service Staff:

| Role | Name | Ext | Username |
|---|---|---|---|
| Director: | Mike Jinks | 3801 | *kmj1* |
| Deputy Director: | Peter Roberts | 3802 | *pdr1* |
| Departmental Secretary: | Lorraine Moor | 3801 | *lsm1* |
| Head of Technical Services: | Dave Atkin | 3804 | *dla1* |
| Head of User Services: | John Illingworth | 3803 | *jji1* |
| Head of Personal Systems: | Doug Moncur | 3815 | *dgm1* |
| Head of MIS: | Kay Robinson | 2101 | *kr7* |
| Operations Manager: | Brian Souter | 3814 | *bs1* |
| Information Officer: | Joanne Casey | 3805 | *jmc8* |

| Name | Ext | Username | Name | Ext | Username |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Sue Bolton | 2102 | *sjb28* | Peter Halls | 3806 | *pjh1* |
| Mike Brudenell | 3811 | *pmb1* | Sue Hodges | 3839 | *sh32* |
| John Byrne | 3812 | *jcb1* | Paul Hodgson | 4347 | *ph25* |
| David Chambers | 4347 | *dac6* | Geoff Houlton | 2100 | *gph2* |
| Paul Conacher | 4346 | *pac1* | Jenny Jackson | 4455 | *jj5* |
| Mark Cook | 3897 | *rmc12* | John Marsden | 3832 | *jpm1* |
| Sue Dekker | 3800 | *spd2* | John Mason | 3813 | *jrm13* |
| Robert Demaine | 3808 | *rld1* | Darren Munday | 3821 | *dam6* |
| Steve Downes | 3741 | *sd21* | Colin Rea | 3817 | *cr9* |
| Debra Fayter | 3839 | *daf3* | John Robinson | 3833 | *jsr1* |
| Ken Finch | 4452 | *kf1* | Sam Scott | 3817 | *svs2* |
| Rob Fletcher | 3816 | *rpf1* | Andrew Smith | 3809 | *abs4* |
| Kevin Gardner | 3739 | *pkg4* | Timothy Willson | 2123 | *ftmw1* |
| Chris Gowland | 3823 | *cg1* | Michael Woodhead | 3825 | *mw28* |