

University of Bristol ITSS Forum

Provisional Minutes – 20 February 2007

Present:

Alex Butcher - ISYS	Adam Stephens - ISYS
Andrew Dixon Chair Eng	Ed Thomas - Geography
Andy Macintosh – Engineering Maths	Jan Grant- ISYS
Andy Ramsden – LTSS	Jenny Cleeve - Vet Science
Bart Maguire – ISYS	John Richards
Colin Knowles - EFM	Jonathon Scott - Music
Dan Ashby - Chemistry	Luke Taylor - ISYS
Graham Cappi SOMS	Mark Cox - FCT
Gray Harrison -CSSB	Martin Conway -ISYS
Iain Elliott - Pharmacology	Martin Radford ISYS
Iain Hallam – Union	Neil Elliot ISYS
Jenny Pioli -ISYS	Nick Skelton – ISYS
Jon Schumacher – Earth Sciences	Paul Buttner -ISYS
Karthina Harper COBM	Paul Seward _ - ISYS
Keir Mobbs Secretary - Biology	Peter Bygrave - UBU
Kevin Thomas - Estates	Peter Kearsey - Biochemistry
Mally Mclane - Physiology	Phil Wade Elec Engineering
Mark Ellingsen ISYS	Sam Shahin – Engineering
Martin Van Eker - CFME	Simon Speight - EFM
Michael Rickard - Chemistry	Tanja Saunders -Physiology
Miles Pearce – ISYS	Tim Phillips - ISYS
	Winnie Laccessio -Physics

1. Apologies for absence. Apologies received from: Alan Blackman, Sam Savage, Bob Walker, Deb Jacobson, Patrick Townsend, Phillip Naylor and Julian Simpson.
2. Minutes of the last meeting showed errors spotted by ITSS forum members and these are highlighted here:

<http://www.bristol.ac.uk/WorkingGroups/Users/CUC/2006/ITSS%20meeting%20Tuesday%206%20corrections.pdf>

The minutes have been subsequently corrected and can be viewed here:

<http://www.bristol.ac.uk/WorkingGroups/Users/CUC/2006/ITSSminutenov06.pdf>

3. Matters arising. None
4. Chairman's report

Andrew Dixon (AD) advertised the University [IT support staff Wiki](#) . Contributions and comments to the Wiki are slowly accumulating. The Wiki provides useful IT knowledge and everyone should share views and contribute to it. AD was excited about virtualization and suggested at the next IT Support staff conference this should be an item of interest.

Email clients futures in the ISYS report is to be item 6 on the agenda, “Email Systems” to allow discussion.

5. ISYS- REPORT – 1. Introduction and Background 2. Strategic issues

Tim Phillips (TP) informed the meeting that the IT list in PIMS had been built up and includes who every IT person is and what they do, which is useful for communication. TP also suggested that in case of emergency situations, such as the email system going down staff could be texted on their mobile phones. John Richards (JR) further elaborated an emergency text system suggesting we use the current University text messaging system and send texts when appropriate to IT support staff so they are aware of current central critical IT situations. JR also mentioned using the current phone system and providing a group message to IT staff voice mails.

Discussion centred around if staff would want text messaging\voice mail and is the most use being made of the existing IS News web page; Martin Radford (MR) pointed out that the IS news page would only update nightly so emergency messages would appear the next day There was concern over whether there is sufficient information regarding localised as well as central IT problems. It was felt useful that there should be a voice mail message on the help desk line when systems were down such as “the email system is down”. The meeting thought that the text messaging system would be very useful and will go ahead. The initial messages would be brief. IT staff could opt out of the text messaging service if they wanted to.

TP made ITSS members aware there was a review of strategies all around the University and staff and student focus groups were emerging. He suggested that there should be an IT focus group open for IT staff. Martin Radford wonder if this would focus on ‘what you do’ and TP emphasised no it is ‘what we do’ and where we are going with technology and education. The setting up of a consultation process would begin in March 2007 and dates were to be advertised for Focus Groups. IS would quantify and ratify the results. See <http://www.bris.ac.uk/is/news/2007/stratmar.html> for further details.

TP strongly felt security of data needs to be examined. The IT policies have been on providing technology and access to it. TP suggested there needs to be long term best practice methods and examination of what IS does centrally relating to departments. TP suggested these are long term issues. Colin Knowles commented on how long term projects are being provided, as there is no basic information in ITIL (Note - The Information Technology Infrastructure Library (ITIL) is a set of guidance developed by the United Kingdom's Office of Government Commerce (OGC)). JR pointed out that ITIL documentation is very dry but the information on what to do and good ideas is in-between common sense ideas. Also version 3 of ITIL is coming out soon.

TP mentioned High Performance Computers (HPC). Building work going on in Physics to provide HPC but there is a smaller version in the Merchant Venturers building. There is now a team of 3 people led by Ian Stewart and the HPC use is growing and there are good relationships with researchers.

5. ISYS- REPORT – 3 Network and digital communication

Martin Conway (MC) introduced this section. He highlighted the CCRI router problems and is still awaiting advice from CISCO as to the way forward. The current CCRI is running on its previous version after the upgrade caused errors. In the email section of the report Neil Elliot (NE) will implement the auto delete for *possible spam* and *trash*. Only new registered users will get the *trash* folder. Changes will be introduced to new email users but there will need to be documentation for existing users and some of information on the documentation will have to include different mail clients as some people use differing email clients than Mulberry. NE highlighted the Web mail client Squirrel mail and hoped we had used it. JR target is to remove Silkymail at the end of the 2007 Easter vacation. **Action NE.** Peter Bigrave (Union Computing) queried the Skin or look of Squirrelmail as it differed for the linked portal, thus not allowing visual continuity. NE was not sure why different colours were used for the Portal and Squirrelmail. **Action: JR will pass this discrepancy in colours on to the Portal Project manager.**

Dan Ashby (Chemistry) had concerns over the subscription of mail boxes being turned off in Squirrelmail. NE pointed out a person may have 100 plus folders and in order to reduce load up time might not want them all displayed. NE wondered if this issue of non subscription of folders was a big enough issue.

NE reported that SmartSieve was active now and Procmail was going to be removed. Martin Radford wondered if we could use Smartsieve on shared mail boxes. Adam Stephens said this was not possible as we would need to upgrade a server to accommodate this.

Adam Stephens mentioned the replacement of Majodomo to a new system. All the mailing lists will need to be moved across and there will be no need to re-enter lists. Iain Hallam (IH) wondered if there could be 3 levels of management queries in the new systems. Local support staff admin, admin and users. This would allow IH and his team to manage/change memberships of the numerous Student Union society mailing lists easily. **Action:Adam Stephens is to investigate providing a 3 level management of mailing lists where required.**

NE raised VMPS issues and hardware problems and having to replace the server. Hopefully the problems with CCRI are in hand. NE spoke about DHCP and is currently working with Mike Rickard (Chemistry) hopefully to produce a centralised DHCP system to reduce local support. MR (Chemistry) is investigating the use of PXE booting on systems so that users can rebuild their own computers. Psychology showed an interest this.

5 ISYS- REPORT 4. System and Research Computing 4.1 Central File storage 4.2 Disk to Disk back up.

Jan Grant (IS) highlighted the central file store and the acquired NAS heads provisions. Initially central file storage development was for central use, but it has been offered to a number of departments. The idea being to take away local central file storage from departments and provide a central storage system and backup. This service has been popular and the new system is full. Clearly there is a need for centralised backed up file space. Nick Bruton, Paul Buttner, Jan Grant and Ian Stewart are conducting a survey of pilot users to discover what is good and bad about the service and take subsequent improvements. AD recommended the central file storage and back up service combined that allowed local control of file structure and security but felt that the documentation of the service was weak. Jan Grant was keen to provide the centralised service but devolve responsibility locally.

With the disk to disk backup there is a charge £1K install then £1k per terabyte per annum there after. Sandra Stone and Harvey Ditchfield are keen to provide management of backup systems for departmental needs. Current target are numerous tape to tape systems but they are reinvestigating several node disk to disk back up systems. There are plans to have second node back up storage at the University of West of England (UWE).

SRCT is looking at virtualisation with a Solaris bent to provide service and business continuity. This service is being targeted at MIS but if there is a local departmental interest contact Jan Grant.

Alex Butcher raised concern about the back up being stored at (UWE) as it is not on our premises and would the data be encrypted or not? JG implied this was a trade off. AB felt if we stored on our NAS head data storage then it is confidential, but if it is stored at UWE what should the security implications and the encryption policies be? *Further investigation/policy is currently being investigated before data is stored on the UWE site premises*

Iain Hallam wondered if the data storage was compatible with Active Directory and Jan Grant confirmed it was. Winnie Laccessso (Physics,) wondered if the charging was due to supply demands. JG replied that the charge was for the physical cost of the hard disk space and the service. Michael Rickard wondered how far there was to be a tiered service providing short and long term storage. TP felt it was important to look at data in the university and develop long term policies.

5 ISYS REPORT 5. Personal Computing Systems -

Paul Buttner highlighted interest in using a VMWare (??) server and the topic of Virtualisation in the IT support staff conference would go into further detail, PB felt the main issues of Virtualisation were resilience and monitoring, the need to know which bits are up and running and when a service is available or not. NE asked which type of Virtualisation and at what level. PB replied, initially a VMS service to run and to have more servers on a blade server.

Miles Pearce (MP) mentioned MacAfee's Anti-virus management console 3.6. Users of the service will have to upgrade to version 3.6 on their consoles. MP also mentioned the change of supplier of laptops and printers from XMA to GETECH. The main reason for this change is the XMA UOB education web pricing site malfunctioned for a few months and so no accurate purchases via the university could be made. Despite frequent citing of this malfunction by MP XMA did not respond. IT staff are now recommended to use GETECH for Toshiba laptop/HP printer purchases. GEtech has provided a good service for students purchasing laptops through the University. However, if ITSS members have had a good relationship with XMA then they can choose to continue using purchase from XMA if they choose to.

PB mentioned there is going to be a mini-competition regarding Computer hardware and unless we get substantive value for money then PB is happy to continue with Viglen. However we shall see what the deals offered by the competition provide.

Jenny Pioli advertised the new Viglen UOB PC range. It was agreed that floppy disk drives should not be included in the Viglen UOB range of computers. However an optional tick box for a floppy should exist on the order web site in case someone wants it.

In relation to Microsoft Vista, Martin Radford saw no need to adopt it at the present time, though interest was shown in cases where Vista could handle security and administration rights better. One is looking towards 1.5 to 2 years before Vista becomes adopted. However the pressure will come from laptops as soon they will not be supplied with Microsoft XP.

Michael Rickard mentioned IE7 not being supported and wondered when it would be? PB mentioned there was not a time scale and the web interface is not easy to evaluate with IE7 and some of our web services. Mark Ellington mentioned that we have third party web interfaces so it is difficult to evaluate IE7 integration overall. However Dan Ashy was concerned about Vista on laptops having IE7 and also AD felt it would be useful to know by the end of June 2007 the University policy on IE7 due to PC rebuilds taking place in summer.

Martin Radford mentioned the upgrading of the Authentication proxy server. The only issue with it is a clash with Norton Internet security. This will affect some home users. MR will keep the existing system as a fail over. However the upgrade is due to go ahead on 01 March 2007.

5 ISYS - REPORT 6. Software.

In Blackboard it was noted that new office style formats were not allowed to be loaded. If this is the case can the providers be pushed to provide updates, otherwise upload it via Blackboard.

Action: Andy Ramsden will look into this. Iain Hallam wondered if there was a way to provide a Virtualising Software license. PB replied that there were different VMSs and this is an issue for the IT support staff conference. Jan Grant mentioned if we look at the general support of VMS then this is a management issue. TP will get Alan Blackman to look at the Virtual License agreements.

AD raised the query suggested from the libraries that undergraduates should have licenses to use Endnote. This is to be referred to Alan Blackman and Paul Woods. Michael Rickard raised the point that the Redhat Linux was about to expire in July 2007 and anyone that this affects should get contact Alan Blackman.

5. ISYS- REPORT 7. Web Database and Library Systems.

There was nothing to add to the report. However as raised in the last ITSS meeting there is concern over the calendar authentication upgrade to 10 G and the backend to users accounts. In the move to UoB authentication in calendar the question is do we do it in phases or in one go, In the last ITSS forum meeting there was discussion about the Kerberos clients issue, rolling it out and password changes issues. Now an alternative is being looked at such as using an internet directory and authentication. The calendar team is looking into 2 or 3 other options other than the MIT Kerberos authentication.

5. ISYS- REPORT 8. Internet Development.

As read in the report nothing to add.

5. ISYS- REPORT 9 Application Development.

As read in the report nothing to add.

6. Email Systems

John Richards (JR) set out to explain where the email project was going and then open up the topic for discussion,

JR set out that the email clients replacement project was initially to replace the web based client and the desktop client. The introduction of Squirrelmail as the web based client has gone well and that was the easy part. The replacement of Mulberry as desktop client is next.

JR suggested we stay as we are or look at and examine a new client IMAP system such as Thunderbird or Outlook. Introducing a new system requires a lot of work so maybe introduce a new client system while Mulberry is used for a while. We can have 2 systems for a while however IT staff and users would have 2 email clients to worry about and support. JR felt in investigating a new email client system that we need to look at the bigger picture. For example can the email clients integrate with the calendar and address book? Should we look at email in isolation? Also we have to look ahead to 5 years where email becomes integrated with voicemail,

videos etc. Email is more than just a way of communicating. So the email project board has been asked to write reports concerning the short term email client and the long term plan.

AD felt email is a critical part of the IT infrastructure and invited ITSS members comments about what can email achieve, what preferences people have and whether people favour an email client a change in infrastructure or both.

MR (Chemistry) felt reluctantly that we should carry on with Mulberry at the moment even though the IMSP demon we use at the moment has now ceased. However changes to another client would not work effectively with the LDAP facilities. MR proposed do nothing a new email client would reduce users interface complaints but there would be integration difficulties. Either that or use an Oracle collaboration Suite but the interface is terrible or spend a lot of money and buy Exchange 2007.

Adam Stephens pointed out there is an Outlook connector with Oracle. Neil Elliot felt that the calendaring represented only a stand alone suite. Ian Elliot felt we had the choice of throwing a lot of money at the solution or resorting to open source software. Ed Thomas Geography felt that we should have Squirrelmail the web client and Outlook as the Desktop. This is due to Oracle not handling PDAs well and people don't like Mulberry. Kevin Thomas felt most people use email and integration. Dan Ashby felt at this stage we should either do nothing or buy in a full suite produce rather than just an email client. AD felt it may be good if desktops had Thunderbird client and use the k: drive to get IMSP in. MR (Chemistry) thought this was possible using Active Directory information and preconfiguration of existing settings but what about home users who cannot get k: drive. Dan Ashby felt there will always be people who want to use something different but the issue is what to support and what not to. Alex Butcher felt that having voice mail as well would be attractive. There was questioning about the ongoing support of Mulberry and patches for this product are still being issued at the present time. Colin Knowles was reluctant to have an intermediate email client introduced and felt we had a better position carrying on with Mulberry until a better collaborative email suite came along. A better collaborative integrated email client system is preferable but campaigning and a powerful plan will need to be put to the university to get funding.

AD asked for votes on options at this stage for an email infrastructure 5 year review.

- Collaborative Infrastructure with voice options and calendar. -majority voted for.
- Maintain Mulberry as an interim - majority voted for.
- Microsoft Outlook. Exchange – only 5 votes for.
- Thunderbird – only 8 votes for.
- Oracle collaboration suit 0 – voted for.

ITSS agreed to keep Mulberry as an interim email client and further investigation is needed into a collaborative infrastructure with voice options and calendar.

JR felt everything considered, the email systems ought to have central personal configured storage; be intuitive, easy to use, platform independent and finally be able to operate on mobile devices. Subsequent to this ITSS meeting John Richards presented a report below.

<https://www.bris.ac.uk/ict-projects/emailclients/docs/docs/emailreview.pdf>

LTSS report.

Andy Ramsden (AR) recommended using the Wiber tool. This allows webtop desk conferencing for up to 20 people. This can be done with or without a camera. AR also mentioned the presence of academic e-learning representatives in each faculty. They are part time except Science which has a full time representative. AR will feedback documentation showing the e-learning representative contacts for each faculty and the appropriate contacts in LTSS., E-Learning representative have access to resources and funding so are worth contacting for local /faculty e-learning teaching projects.

User Items

The UCISA Distributed Support Staff Conference is on 21st-22nd June 2007 at St Anne's College Oxford.

Mark Cox highlighted that UCISA are running a conference over 3 days for distributed support staff. The structure of the meeting is 4 or 5 sessions timetabled. The course is charged for but it gives the opportunity to network with other universities.

Iain Hallam recommended that if we can have the IS logo on computer room screens can we have the Student Help site advertised. This is to raise awareness of the useful Student Help site. AD mentioned that Richard Edwards would be issuing mouse mats advertising the site in public access computer rooms. Iain Hallam felt clients look at the screen and mouse mats disappear from their visual field. There was concern that once the computers were used to advertise web site logos the gates would be open for other adverts. The matter was referred to IS for further consideration.

AOB

Iain Hallam felt the file access for students was haphazard. Students can access files by Fluff, k: drive (CUFS) and local Departmental drives Paul Buttner felt this issue should be put to the portal Schemas and the issues will become easier with central file storage.

The next IT Support Staff forum meeting is on Tuesday 22 May 2007.

The venue will be the Senior Common Room, Hawthorn's House. The meeting starts at the later time of 2:30pm.