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ICTF News

VOLUME 1, ISSUE 2



UNIVERSITY OF
OXFORD



HILARY 2009

We made it to Issue 2

Welcome to the second edition of ICTF news. I hope you really enjoy reading this edition, my thanks to all the contributors.

I've had the opportunity to meet a number of you over this last term in various colleges and departments and one thing I'm always struck by is how many projects (of varying size) are being undertaken around the University. It is a pity that no one gets to hear about all this work. I think it would be really beneficial to other colleagues about to take on similar projects in their own units. It would also explain to the wider University more about what local IT staff do and the projects they are involved with.

One of the aims of this newsletter is to give the opportunity for IT staff to talk about various projects taking place in their departments and colleges and we would like to extend this by also having a slot for IT staff at the termly ICTF meeting. Maybe you've discovered a really useful software tool or have some best practice advice. No matter what it is, we would like to give ITSS the opportunity to give a brief talk at the meetings. Perhaps you've had a new CCTV system or security system installed. Maybe you're refitting your server room or setting up a new computer room. Anything at all really. Whether you would like to write something for the newsletter or give a brief talk at an ICTF meeting then please let us know. As all good adverts say, our operators are standing by for your call.

Lastly, don't forget the ICT Forum Conference this year is on **Wednesday 15th July at the Saïd Business School**. Get the date in your diary now!

Jeremy Worth
ICTF Chair & Archaeology IT Manager

Information Security Advisory Group awarded £20k

Jonathan Ashton from OxCERT in OUCS has set up the Information Security Advisory Group. The Group has successfully gained £20k from the ASUC contingency fund, with the help of Professor Paul Jeffreys, the University's Director of ICT.

The money will be used to fund a six-month-post assurance administrator to manage the work of the Advisory Group in organizing self-assessment tools and methods for colleges and departments to be used to measure against a set of 'Conditions of Connection' recommendations. The assurance administrator will then encourage and assist all colleges and departments in working through the self-assessment process and making timely returns. The returns will be anonymised and the intention is that each unit should be able to assess how well it does against an average from returns of similar units.

The assurance administrator will coordinate advice and liaison between units and members of the IS-AG. The assurance administrator's final deliverable will be

a report giving the overall status of units across the collegiate University measured against the current 'Conditions of Connection' criteria, together with an estimate of the resources the University will need to invest in order that units which fall short can be brought up to the agreed standards.

Commenting on this project Professor Jeffreys said:

"I think this is an excellent opportunity for the collegiate University to self-assess its quality of IT provision and security, and to determine where resources need to be invested to ensure that the overall IT infrastructure is fit-for-purpose".



ICTF Steering Group Profile: Gerard Robinson

I joined the Nuffield Department of Anaesthetics (NDA) as a Research Electronics Engineer in 1985 and developed a number of dedicated embedded microprocessor control systems to support their research activities.

Previously I had been involved in automating Jordan's (the cereal producer not Katie Price, nor the F1 racing team) grain silo and also developing medical recording systems with a Vickers' Company.

Personal Computing eventually arrived and my position in NDA evolved to include support for the new computers, (this was before the days when PC stood for either Political Correctness or Personal Computer), use of Gandalf links between the Radcliffe Infirmary (RI) & John Radcliffe Hospital (JR), and installing a University network in the RI. A

Netware 3 server for the department followed soon after that. At the same time the Data Centre of the Nuffield Department of Clinical Medicine was evolving into IMSU and a closer liaison



Gerard sailing on the 'Annabel J', a replica Bristol Cutter

developed. IMSU was offering more services than could adequately be supported by one person so a transfer deal was struck and I took up my current post in 1999. This coincided with a re-location to the Warneford Hospital to provide on-site support to the Department of Psychiatry whilst also co-ordinating between the JR HQ of IMSU and the Warneford, South Parks Road, Old Road Campus, now known as the satellite sites. The RI finally closed in 2008.

When I was the NDA representative on what was the Computer Users' Group I rashly agreed to assist in organising a conference for the increasing number of distributed IT Support Staff. This led to the formation of the IT Support Staff Group, which was the first official recognition by the University of our profession. The rest, as they say, is history.

Outside the world of IT you'll see me with Oxford University Morris Men in Radcliffe Square on May Morning (and many other places beside), treading the boards or cruising the inland waterways aboard nb Sweaty Betty.

Gerard Robinson
Assistant Director
Information Management Services Unit

ICTF Conference 2009: 15th July at the Saïd Business School. Get the date in your diary now!

PGP: Secure Exam Paper Preparation and Transmission

The project to look at email encryption for exam papers in preparation dates back to 2006 and has uncovered several challenges in rolling out desktop encryption solutions.



Over the last few months a few users have been involved in a trial of PGP Desktop, centrally managed by PGP Universal Server. The idea was to make the encryption process as seamless as possible to the end user by performing certain policy decisions, and functionality on the server. With the chosen configuration, the experience for the user (once they have enrolled) is such that they need to

know to invoke the encryption (by using a specific string in the subject line) and their passphrase. The email is then either sent encrypted to all

recipients or rejected. The server handles key management and enforces passphrase strength. Different mail policies can be set for different user groups.

Of course this is just the tip of the iceberg. So far we've only looked at email encryption and the solution isn't perfect – there have been bugs and questionable features along the way! PGP Desktop client is only available for Windows and Mac OSX, although PGP supports openPGP and S/MIME so integration with other solutions (e.g. GPG, Enigma) is theoretically possible. All this said, there does seem to be some demand for a central service in this area. Recently the Groupware Programme Development Panel met and agreed that a project to offer such a service will be commissioned. It is proposed that the service will be run centrally with the opportunity for co-existing local provision. If you would like to join in the discussion, the recently formed ICTF Information Security Advisory Group would welcome any comments or questions via the ITSS talkshop forum at <https://talkshop.itss.ox.ac.uk/talkshop/> More detail on the exam papers encryption project is at <http://projects.oucs.ox.ac.uk/pgp/> and we are hoping to get some results back in the next few months.

Jonathan Ashton
OxCERT
OUCS

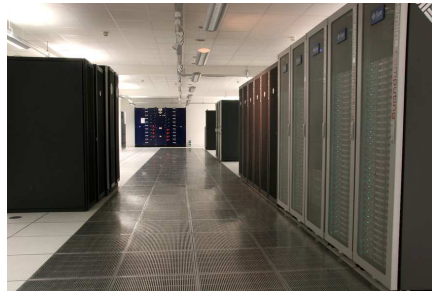
The Shared Data Centre Project

Many departments and colleges have to resort to running critical IT equipment in small spaces that have often been converted from their original purpose at relatively high cost (both financial and in terms of staff time). The current situation for purpose-built data centres is not much better. For example, the data centre in OUCS is over thirty years old. In the modern environmental and economic climate this is clearly not a desirable situation.

The University has established a major capital project, sponsored by the Estates Directorate and the Office of the Director of IT, to build a new, shared data centre for the University, with the opening date planned for the last quarter of 2010.

Although the design and specification of the data centre floor are not yet finalised, the facility is expected to be able to house up to 150 racks, a significant proportion of which are intended to be utilised by departments and colleges. The data

centre will be housed in the basement of the new Oxford Molecular Pathology Institute (OMPI) which will replace the Leslie Martin Building after its demolition. The new facility will be managed by OUCS who, together with other IT providers in the University, are providing significant input to the design phase.



Data centre energy consumption is one of the most urgent topics in IT both for environmental reasons and as Oxford departments will be keenly aware, the recent huge increase in energy prices. In

addition an EU Data Centre Code of Conduct has recently been released to promote best practice with a major focus on energy efficiency. David Birds, OUCS Data Centre Manager said, "The facility will make use of both CHP [Combined Heating and Power] systems in addition to partial ambient air cooling to lower our total energy consumption".

Once the new data centre is finished it is hoped that the existing OUCS data centre can also be modernised to provide greater redundancy and resilience for critical Oxford ICT systems. OUCS has been allocated some funding in order to commission a feasibility and project design study for the proposed data centre refurbishment.

Jon Lockley
Oxford Supercomputing Centre

"Data Centre energy consumption is one of the most urgent topics in IT both for environmental reasons...and energy prices"

Welcome Lucie to Central Purchasing

Lucie Elliott has joined the Purchasing Team in the Finance Division and has overall responsibility for IT contracts, frameworks and purchases. Lucie comes to us from Oxford University Press so has some experience of Oxford already. More recently she was a Buyer at Reed Elsevier.



Please get in touch with her regarding your IT purchases as you might just be surprised at how much money you can save for your department or college by using the deals negotiated by her department.

"The Purchasing Team has been invaluable in making sure we get the best possible value for the University in the procurement of the large amount of kit necessary for the groupware project", said Mark Norman (groupware project manager).

"They even coached us into running a 'reverse auction' saving the University an awful lot of money purchasing our servers. New ground for us: all in a day's work for the purchasing team."

Lucie Elliott, IT Buyer
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http://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/finance/purch_payment/purchasing/

Introducing the Staff Gateway

A new Staff Gateway for the University website is being introduced in mid-April. Located one level below the University homepage at www.ox.ac.uk/staff, it will replace the current Information for Staff site and provide a new online entry point to a range of web pages located within the www.ox.ac.uk and admin.ox.ac.uk domains.

Designed to help staff access the information and online tools they need quickly and easily, the Gateway provides links to the most frequently requested pages (such as pay dates and term dates), as well as grouping information by theme so that related content published across different sites is collated under the same heading (such as 'computing and phones' or 'travel and transport').

The design of the Gateway has been informed by extensive user research and testing. This has shaped both the look and feel of the site as well as the navigation, with the Gateway employing a range of organisation schemes in order to cater to the different search preferences of users, from A-Z listings to topic and task-based structures.

The Gateway will be launched in two phases: firstly, a soft launch of the beta site, during which the old and the new sites will run in parallel so that the links can be tested and feedback collated from users; and secondly, a hard launch in its final location. Look out for an email in mid-April announcing the soft launch, then please send us your feedback at staff.gateway@admin.ox.ac.uk.

Susannah Wintersgill
Head of Internal Communications



Oxford University ICT Forum Steering Group

ICTF Chair:

Jeremy Worth (Archaeology)

ICTF Secretary:

Sarah Lawson (Harris Manchester)

Elected Members:

Jonathan Ashton (OUCS)

S. Ashley Woltering (Statistics)

Gerard Robinson (IMSU)

Janet McKnight (OUCS)

Rob Devereux (Linacre)

Natasha Heaton (Anthropology)

Co-opted members:

Jon Lockley (Oxford Supercomputing Centre)

Katherine Ferguson (Libraries)

**... representing all Oxford University's IT Staff
in top-level ICT decision-making and planning**



ICTF provides a framework that promotes and facilitates excellence incorporating the full involvement of ICT Staff in both the strategic development and day-to-day running of ICT in the Collegiate University. The ICTF Steering Committee (ICTFSC) oversees the operation of the ICTF. The Steering Committee is led by the ICTF Secretary and meets at least once per term, usually just prior to the ICTF termly meeting.

Got an article or idea for an article?

Email it to its3@oucs.ox.ac.uk

<http://www.ictf.ox.ac.uk>

Software Licencing – what it means for you

Richard Saxton and Diane Mitchell look after software licencing from OUCS. Their colleagues run license servers and sell/distribute software products.

There are many site license agreements, enabling individual software products to be distributed throughout the University. Some of these agreements (e.g. SPSS and Endnote) are funded centrally. A small advisory group exists to decide how to spend this funding of around £100k per year and has representatives from each of the divisions as well as from ITSS and the colleges. The group looks at each software contract as it reaches a renewal point (normally every 3- 5 years) to decide whether the software continues to meet criteria suitable for central funding.

Current members of the group are: Mike Giles (MPLS Division); Gerard Robinson (Medical Sciences Division); Carol Leonard and Natasha Heaton (Social Sciences

Division); Vacancy (Humanities Division); Sarah Lawson (ITSS); Richard Saxton (OUCS Software Licencing) ; David Rischmiller (OUCS Group Manager); and Diane Mitchell (OUCS, Secretary to the Group).

Site licenses can also be funded by bringing together small groups of departments who are interested in particular software products so that economies of scale can be achieved by bulk purchases.

Sometimes it is not possible to find full funding for site licenses by sharing costs as above, however so long as one department is prepared to underwrite the license we can then arrange to sell individual licenses out to other users from OUCS, transferring the funds back to the underwriting department.

If we can assist you with entering a site license agreement as described above or if your department already has a site license agreement that we do not know about please get in touch with us at software@oucs.ox.ac.uk.

You can find current software agreements at <http://www.oucs.ox.ac.uk/sls/>

