ICTF News

OXFORD UNIVERSITY ICT FORUM

UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD

ICTF

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TRINITY 2009

Welcome to the conference

Well, here it is, the third edition of ICTF news, marking the end of its first year of existence. I am grateful to the members of the ICTF Forum, including its Steering Committee who have contributed so many useful and interesting articles. It certainly makes my job as editor easier!

The ICTF diary is now firmly established and includes many opportunities to network with IT Support Staff from around this University and wider and this conference must surely be the highlight of the year. This year's conference is, once again, our biggest yet. The bookings database closed at 343 people attending and this year we have three sponsors: CAE Technology Services; Khipu; and Merlin Presentation Systems. We've some excellent speakers including many of you as well as Graham Cluley from Sophos, one of the world's leading experts in viruses and spam .

I think the ICT Forum can expect an exciting future and I have been extremely impressed at how the Steering Committee has grasped the opportunity to make a real difference to ICT provision, management and support in the University of Oxford. It's always risky to name only a few things but I am particularly pleased that the Information Security Advisory Group has been given £20k for the important security self-assessment work and I think having a full-time member of staff (Miranda Llewellyn) on this project for six months shows extremely clearly how seriously the University is taking the ICTF. The Groupware advisory group has also been a big help to the Groupware project in making sure that IT Support Staff have been properly considered and consulted throughout the planning and rollout process. I hope this will make your lives easier and enable you to help in as pain-free a way as possible in the imminent mass-migrations from Herald to Nexus. I know the groupware team is very grateful to you for all your help and support so far.

I hope you all have an excellent day!

Tony Brett
Head of IT Support Staff Services

The calm before the storm at 2007's conference

OxPoints is here

The Erewhon Project has launched Oxford's new OxPoints service to help create a range of geo-spatial services to support staff and students across the University. The system uses the RDF standard as its underlying storage method and allows for complex relationships and queries to be used which are not easily represented in traditional database models. The data stored in OxPoints currently includes information about Colleges, Departments, Museums, Libraries and even Car Parks; this is set to increase as new sources of data are found and consumed by the system. If you have a source of data you would like to be included, please drop the team a note at the address below!

The data can currently be accessed in a number of simple yet powerful ways via URLs. Examples include asking for all the buildings owned by a particular college or department or finding all the car parks accessible in the University. This data can be used to provide routes from place to place or help find the nearest facility to a user's location.

Try heading to Google maps and typing in http://m.ox.ac.uk/oxpoints/colleges.kml and see what you get!

* Contact the Erewhon/OxPoints Team: erewhon@oucs.ox.ac.uk
* OxPoints Documentation: http://www.oucs.ox.ac.uk/oxpoints
* The Erewhon Project Blog: http://oxforderewhon.wordpress.com

Oh no! It's That Forum Again...

Many of you have put yourselves forward for the ICT Forum's Steering Committee. Having spent a year on the Steering Committee, I thought I would share some of about what it does, how it works and also why you should really get involved and get behind it.

Soon, the initial glow of being elected to the ICTF Steering Committee wanes and the heady feelings of power settle back to reality. There is a lot of stuff that the ICT Forum does and therefore a lot that the Steering Committee has to do other than the obvious things. Running an annual conference however does tend to dominate business after Christmas until the event has passed and a new Committee takes over.

It's September and following lots of holidays that tend to preclude summer meetings, the first Steering Committee meeting dawns and presents an opportunity to get to know one another outside of email. The merits of many committees lie in their membership and whether they gel quickly to provide something useful for the people they represent.   Sadly I was ill and couldn't attend but that didn't stop the others meeting up and starting on with business to co-opt extra members onto the committee – Jon Lockley (OeRC) and Katherine Ferguson (Libraries) joined us to add strength in areas where we didn't have good representation – and continuing the organisation of the IT suppliers exhibition which is already underway by this time and details are confirmed. ICTF Chairman Jeremy Worth also joined the PRAC ICT sub-committee (PICT).

It was still only September and already there had been a mooted Bletchley Park trip discussed in email. I made a suggestion to the committee on an issue that is bugging me in my unit with students failing to attend agreed appointments because of departmental demands. Several committee members took the matter higher for me, both in their personal and ICTF capacities. There really is

Rob enjoying the great outdoors

opportunity to change things for yourself for the better in ICTF. A newsletter was suggested and many of the Steering Committee wrote key articles to make something interesting and informing for IT support staff to take away from the next ICTF meeting. You start to realise at this point that those things that we often take for granted (and maybe even bin so easily) take a considerable amount of someone's time in planning and delivery.

Outside of the twelve or so meetings each year, many committee members are involved in other committees or take matters forward with service providers, outside agencies and the Office of Director of IT (ODIT) to try to get the best deals, the best information and the best support and representation for IT support staff.

I made the next meeting. It was only November, and we had already had a long and in-depth debate about establishing a Groupware Advisory Group to represent ICTF members' interests to the Groupware Project Team. The first meeting of the new "GW-AG" was hot on the heels of the second ICTF Steering Committee

meeting. On the back of the successful launch of the GW-AG, other Special Interest Groups were formed and others persuaded out of "OUCS-only" territory to be open to all ITSS. We reviewed and updated the ICTF websites to make them interesting and relevant, pioneering the Talkshop forum that Jeremy Rowntree set up as a useful tool for ITSS discussion. There was another ICTF meeting to plan and the ITSS Christmas event too; something that I hadn't realised before, that ICTF arranged to support those ITSS who may not have otherwise have the opportunity to enjoy a semi-formal dinner in a College setting.

The newsletter was out and ready by the end of November and the next ICTF meeting due on 11th December. You'd think it was just a matter of turning up but there's a lot to do getting the regular speakers to attend and ensure their reports look forward as well as telling is what they have just done. Arranging free food for as many ITSS as want to attend, and an agenda that is interesting and informative are also essential elements in planning the ICTF meetings.

After the over-indulgence of Christmas and the reality that it's all back to work again, it's February and already the Steering Committee is meeting to arrange July's conference. Although a lot can be carried forward from previous years, it is good to remember that as far as venues, goodies, sponsors, workshops and plenary speakers are concerned, they pretty much start from scratch every year to produce the high quality event that we all know and love...and yes, the food problems at last year's event were high on the agenda!

Another Steering Committee meeting and more preparation for the next ICTF meeting at the end of Hilary term. We are now alternating a conference meeting and a Steering Committee meeting every couple of weeks to try to get the important stuff detailed and in place. Jane Littlehales (OUCS) and Simon Thomson (Pembroke) joined the meeting to look after sponsorship and commercial exhibitors. It sounds like a lot of work but the excellent Committee that you have in place bears the weight of the responsibility well and no one individual is left doing it all. ITS3 staff take the minutes, relieving other members of that chore, and the discussion is lively but helpful. You start to learn that the people that work in IT in Oxford University genuinely care about what they do and want to spread knowledge and information freely amongst their fellow IT staff.

It is now Trinity Term. The plans for the conference are coming together. The Steering Committee is winding down before new members come on-board and the whole process restarts for next year. I suspect I haven't sold it to you very strongly...and that isn't really my intention honestly, but if you do want to make a difference in how IT works in the University; if you do want to make sure that we continue to have excellent exhibitions, talks and conferences; if you want to be part of a challenging group committed to making things better, then do sign up and get involved. This is your chance!

Rob Devereux
IT Manager
Linacre College

How green is your Unit's IT?

Did you know that as of April 2010, the University of Oxford and its colleges will have to submit emissions information to the government as part of the CRC (Carbon Reduction Commitment)? This information will then be entered into a league table and we will be judged against other Universities. That means that Estates and College will be looking carefully at IT to see if we can reduce our emissions.

Howard Noble at OUCS is heading up the low-carbon ICT project to look at ways to help all ITSS. He held the "Keeping IT Clean" conference at the Saïd business School on 22 May this year. The conference web pages contain a lot of information: http://projects.oucs.ox.ac.uk/lowcarbonict/conferences/conf-2.htm
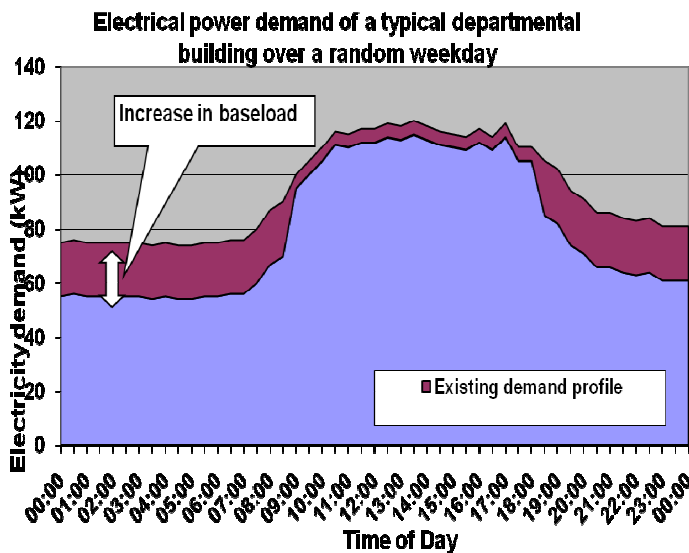
So how do we get our users interested? Simple, everyone wants to do their bit for the environment, and one small difference to make would be to switch off computers / monitors when not in use (overnight and weekends typically). This actually makes a saving of £80 a year roughly.

Electrical power demand of a typical departmental building over a random weekday

Increase in baseload

Electricity demand (kWA)

Existing demand profile

Time of Day

As a starting point, how about looking at the advice at http://www.oucs.ox.ac.uk/greenit/desktop.xml

One of the suggested changes is to adopt the Wake-on-Lan and monitoring services. All ITSS have to do is install a gateway to use these services. They will then allow users to wake up their PCs for remote access, backups and even just to be ready when they arrive in the morning. You even get graphical feedback on how you're doing on your unit's energy savings!

Natasha Heaton
IT Manager
Social and Cultural Anthropology & Area Studies

"Emissions data will be entered into a league table and we will be judged against other Universities "

IT Suppliers Exhibition 2009: 10th Dec at the Exam Schools. Get the date in your diary now!

ITSS BBQ: 7 Aug

Come and join Oxford ITSS for an evening of fun, food and drink at the dept of Anthropology at 64 Banbury Road in its lovely gardens. This event already has 16 booked, many of whom will bring partners and/or friends.

It's been a great success for the last two years so do come along. Bring your own food and drink—ITS3 will provide the BBQ, plates and cups.

Natasha showing us how to do it in 2007

Kick-off at 6pm and we'll probably finish around10pm. Booking as normal via https://register.oucs.ox.ac.uk/itss_booking

Bletchley Park Trip: meet Enigma

ICTF Steering Committee is shortly to arrange a trip to Bletchley Park. it will be a day's trip for Oxford ITSS, visiting the computer museum and the code breaking huts, accompanied by a guide and with lunch and refreshments provided. Date and cost to be advised.

The Enigma Machines, including the rare 'Abwehr G312', are undoubtedly a highlight of a visit to Bletchley Park, but there is much more to see. Check out the tales of spies and strategic deception and you may even be the one to discover the map to genius mathematician Alan Turing's silver, supposedly buried in or near Bletchley Park!

Other interesting items include wartime toys and working computers. There's a wartime mini cinema and an outstanding Churchill collection. You can see the ornate Victorian Mansion that was headquarters to intelligence staff during the War.

The OxBridge Colleges IT Conference was held that that venue in 2007 and was a great success. Watch ITSS News & Events for more information on this excellent networking opportunity.

Sarah Lawson
ICTF Secretary

The Enigma Machine

Oxford University ICT Forum Steering Committee

ICTF Chair:
Jeremy Worth (Archaeology)

ICTF Secretary:
Sarah Lawson (Harris Manchester)

Elected Members:
Jonathan Ashton (OUCS)
Gerard Robinson (IMSU)
Janet McKnight (OUCS)
Natasha Heaton (Anthropology)
Vacancy
Vacancy

Co-opted members:
Possible to co-opt up to 3 more people as ICTF-SC sees fit

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

ICTF

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 (ICTF-SC) 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

International Supercomputing '09

In late June Jon Lockley, Tolis Sisiaridis and Jo Shields attended International Supercomputing 09, which at 1,600 delegates is Europe's biggest High Performance Computing event. General purpose processing with graphics card technology and Cloud computing were both high on the agenda. The former seems to have matured from a technology with potential to a commercially-viable arms race between vendors. Cloud on the other hand seems to be a much less certain proposition in the HPC space with far more talk than concrete data.

Future chip design also got a lot of attention with a strong message that HPC requires more inventive strategies (or should that be a return to twenty year old strategies?) such as heterogeneous chips with specialised arithmetic units. Simply piling more x86 cores into silicon is not far from running out of steam largely due to memory constraints. This is significant because several vendors have noted that with the popularity of virtualisation continuing to rise, HPC could become the dominant marketplace for servers 5-10 years from now.

But perhaps even more importantly, many delegates demonstrated that the one thing which continues to improve application performances far beyond Moore's law was writing and re-writing them to suit the architecture they run on whatever that might be.

Jo Shields with an NEC SX9

LGBT in IT?

Are you a member of IT Support Staff who identifies as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual or Transgender? It probably won't surprise you to know that you are not alone!

For the first time in its 900-year history, the University of Oxford has created an official LGBT group for all staff, including ITSS, after conducting a survey of LGBT members of the University.

**UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD
EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY
SEXUAL ORIENTATION**

The new group is a formal staff group for University, college and OUP staff, scholars and tutors, supported by the Vice-Chancellor and administered by the University's Equality and Diversity Unit. As well as providing social opportunities it will help the University get feedback and advice from its LGBT staff.

This year there was for the first time an Oxford University stall at Oxford Pride, and the University sponsored a panel discussion as part of Pride on the topic 'As we celebrate the 40th Anniversary of the Stonewall Rebellion, how far have we progressed?'

See http://tinyurl.com/ox-lgbt-staff for full information on the group and also http://www.ox-lgbt-acad.org.uk for information on an informal group that has existed for many years providing many useful resources including monthly social activities.