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Changing times or just hard times?

The economic squeeze seems to feature every time you hear the news at the moment. Even if you're not one to read newspapers or glance at online news you can't have failed to notice how your weekly shop has become much more expensive and your £20 of fuel is only getting you as far as the next garage!!

It's therefore not surprising that our employers, be they College or University or outside bodies, are looking into their coffers and being a little more cautious about spending money. Many of us in the world of ICT may

already have been approached by our purse-string holders and asked to look at greater efficiencies or ways to cut costs.

Many of you are noticing changes in your departments: mergers, efficiency drives, or budget cuts. University funding and fees changes will inevitably lead to greater expectations from our students. Change is definitely coming, however hard we batten down the hatches!

Is this all bad? Well no, it doesn't have to be and this is just the time that I think as ICT professionals we should be taking an interest in the bigger picture and making our own suggestions, plans and strategies to help get through these times with the best possible outcomes. Talking and collaborating with colleagues is an excellent

way of discovering better practice models that may well help. Simply chatting to colleagues can quickly reassure – a recent trip to Cambridge revealed that the ICT Officers there are feeling exactly the same way as us.



Making sure you are getting the correct information on which to act is a very good tactic in times of change. Listening to hearsay and scaremongering can be very damaging and counterproductive. With that in mind the Steering Committee is trying to ensure that ICTF meetings have as

much fact in them as possible and actively encourage debate and discussion where parties can talk and get involved in decision-making and strategy.

I believe in times like these we should all be proactive in looking to improve our own efficiencies and strategies at work just as we might do in our home lives. We should also make sure that ICT provision is not forgotten or overlooked when departments are looking at changes. Not an easy task in some instances! Now more than ever it is important that ICT staff come up from the basement and help, shape and influence any coming changes.

Sarah Lawson, Secretary of ICT Forum
IT Coordinator, National Perinatal Epidemiology Unit

What Oxford's ICT equipment can do for others

Department and College ICT officers dispose of their old computers and safely clear the data through a range of charitable to commercial services. The Purchasing department is now working on expanding its preferred suppliers to give departments more choice and enhanced contractual assurance of computer disposal; however the need and value of a donation of retired equipment is best illustrated by the most extreme needs.

One of the hopeful recipients is the Destiny Vision Charity working with approximately 3500 children in the Obunga slums of Kenya's Kisumu city; about 90% never have touched a computer.

Poverty is complex. One of its aspects is e-exclusion. At least for now, Obunga's young people struggle to gain IT knowledge in the way that their less disadvantaged brothers and sisters in the rich West might.

Luckily, Jemal Mohammed Osman has already benefited from Oxford's donation via Computer Aid, in collaboration with British Council Eritrea, and she feels it is "opening the gate of computer knowledge."

"I am a grade 10 student in Anseba Islamic Institute Keren and we have got 17 computers ... I have got a first time opportunity of basic computer and applications knowledge ... and now I know website design, internet languages

such as html, java, C+ and more.”

Fifteen of Oxford’s departments and 3 of its Colleges have already done something to address e-exclusion by donating. This of course has the added bonus of reducing the University’s overall carbon footprint as equipment is reused rather than destroyed.

Wadham College and The Department of Physiology, Anatomy and Genetics along with School of Geography and the Environment are also piloting collecting no-longer-needed computers from staff and students charity.

To date the 250 computers that have been donated have benefited 14 charitable organisations in 12 countries. If you would like to know more please contact peter.molduano@admin.ox.ac.uk or on (6)16107.

Peter Molduano
Finance Division



for

Planning is well under way for this year’s ICT Forum Conference at the Kassam Stadium on Thursday 14th July 2011 . Please send workshop and plenary suggestions/offerings to the organising committee via sarah.lawson@npeu.ox.ac.uk. Get the date in your diary now!

Profile: Henryk Glogowski

Like so many I started out in computing while doing a degree at the University of Bristol. Like a (decreasing) number it was by learning FORTRAN, using punched cards. This system was quickly replaced by Multics and I struggled to work out what a ‘file’ was. Ah those halcyon, innocent days. Oh, I ended up writing a simulation of a Beta-ray spectrometer.

After graduating I started working for BT, designing telephone numbering plans and planning upgrades of Strowger

Telephone Exchanges to more ‘modern’ electronic versions (TEX2s & TEX4As for the aficionados out there), System X being horribly delayed. In the corner of my office were a couple of PC’s (Z80, CP/M, 64k RAM – MBASIC and PL/1(!) – I joke not). I even ended up writing a database program (in MBASIC not PL/1 I hasten to add) on one of these. This was used by BT (South West) to track the modernisation of its line plant for many years.

Meanwhile I was offered a chance to work with BT’s external clients and design networks for them. We even had shiny, new Merlin DX’s to play with. I spent many years travelling round the country designing converged data and voice networks. Funny how some things seem to ‘reappear’.

After seven years I decided to become a lecturer, in FE. For many years it was a job I loved – until a certain blue-tinged government

decided to ‘restructure’ FE, leaving most lecturers without any career. Not so funny, how some things seem to be coming back.

So I had to move again and became IT Manager for Andrews (yes, the Estate Agents). To start with it was only me. As the joke went I was ‘IT’. Over a period of seven years I built up the team, the infrastructure and the network. I even made Andrews an ISP, giving it (quite legitimately) access to cheap circuits from BT anywhere in the

country. As part of that job I would travel around the UK to Andrews’ branches and so I would come to Oxford (where incidentally Andrews was started) and to Botley, among other branches in this region, fairly regularly and so got to know Oxfordshire. It’s nice to come back to some things.

However my focus was always on networks. Also I do believe in public service and education (how unfashionable I know) so when a suitable job came up at the University of Bristol I jumped at the chance. I had six+ years there back at my old alma mater. Strange how in life you sometimes find yourself back where you started – if not a circle then a spiral.



Picture taken by Henryk’s daughter, I I

And so, and as you’ve persevered reading this far ‘thank you’, here I am happily washed up on the shores of the dreaming spires of Oxford. I have to say a great big ‘thank you’ to all here who have made me feel so welcome. I greatly look forward to getting to know everyone better and working with you all.

Henryk Glogowski
Head of Networks and Telecommunications Group
OUCS

IT Support for Digital Humanities

Digital Humanities is concerned with the complete lifecycle of any Humanities computing project, from investigation to electronic presentation and, finally, archiving. Digital tools are renovating the face of humanities – researchers can analyse, collaborate, examine, publish, and share using a collection of technologies, research spaces and resources. However, Digital Humanities is not merely the existence of these technologies, hopeful that researchers will accidentally stumble across them while out re-tweeding their jackets. Digital Humanities is an organised movement, introducing academics to technologists for the explicit outcome of transforming Humanities through the efficient use of these technologies.

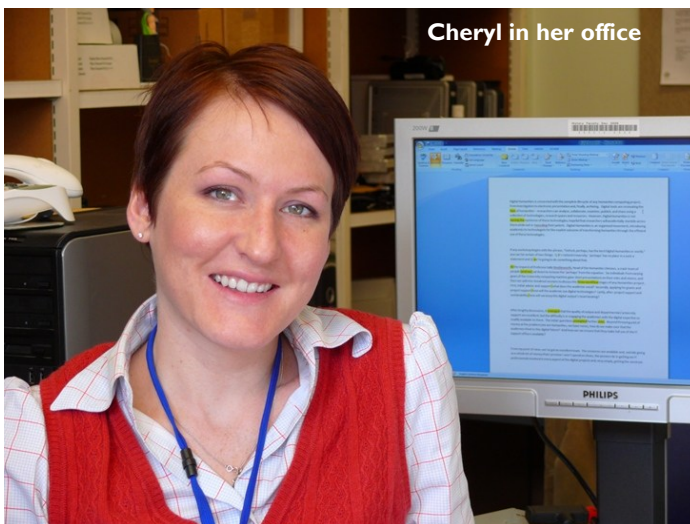
If any workshop begins with the phrase, “Oxford, perhaps, has the best Digital Humanities in the world,” you can be certain of two things: 1) it’s Oxford University; ‘perhaps’ has no place in a such a statement and 2) we’re going to do something about that.

At the request of Professor Sally Shuttleworth, Head of the Humanities Division, a crack team of people (and me) sat down earlier this term to remove the ‘perhaps’ from the equation. Six individuals from varying gears of the University computing machine gave short presentations on their roles and visions, and then we split into breakout sessions to discuss the three workflow stages of any Humanities project. First, initial advice and support: what does the academic need? Secondly, applying for grants and project support: how will the academic use digital technologies? Lastly, after-project support and sustainability: how will we keep this digital output’s heart beating?

After lengthy discussions, it emerged that the quality of output and departmental / university support are excellent, but the difficulty is in engaging the academics with the digital expertise so readily available to them. The initial questions prompted further ones. Beyond throwing a lot of money at the problem (we are Humanities, we have none), how do we make sure that the academics think to the digital future? And how can we ensure that they make full use of the IT support officers available?

From my point of view, we’ve got an excellent team. The resources are available and, aside from giving us a whole lot of money that I promise I won’t spend on shoes, the answers lie in getting us IT professionals involved in every aspect of the digital projects. Very simply, getting the word out.

Cheryl Bresnark
IT Manager
Faculty of History



“the quality of output and departmental / university support are excellent but the difficulty is in engaging the academics with the digital expertise so readily available to them”

Oxford University ICT Forum Steering Committee: could you fill a vacancy?

Following John Lockley’s move to pastures new (Institute of Cancer Research), and the imminent birth of Janet McKnight’s first child there are some gaps on the ICT Forum Steering Committee. The Chair and Secretary positions are also up for election this year.

This is your opportunity to consider how you might have more influence on strategic ICT matters and how you might get to have a deeper involvement in the top-level decision making and resource allocation on all matters ICT in our University.

If you are interested in doing this fascinating work then please do take some time to talk to existing committee members about their experiences and seriously consider standing. I advise discussing it with your line manager too and if you meet resistance please do come to ICTF for advice and help.

As returning officer I will be calling for nominations for Steering Committee posts towards the end of June and the elections, if contested, will be decided by a ballot at the ICT Forum Conference.

Tony Brett



ICTF Chair:

Jeremy Worth (Archaeology)

ICTF Secretary:

Sarah Lawson (NPEU)

Elected Members:

Jonathan Ashton (OUCS)

James Dore (New College)

Natasha Heaton (Anthropology)

Katherine Ferguson (SERS)

2 vacancies

Ex officio:

Tony Brett (OUCS)

Co-opted members:

Alan Hillyer (OUCS-OUTN)

David White (BSP)

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

'First Look' open afternoon at Oxford University Shared Data Centre

After a pleasant lunch at the University Club on 28th January nearly 70 ICTF members assembled outside for the short walk to the University Shared Data Centre that is in the basement of the new Oxford Molecular Pathology Institute. The building is not quite complete—although it has been formally handed over—so the route to the SDC was a bit tortuous and best done in a crocodile!

Pete Jones, David Birds and Jon Hutchings talked about the plans for the USDC and the planned suite of shared infrastructure services, which include co-location and virtualised infrastructure ('cloud') services. Andy Saunders, the new head of the OUCS Network Support and Development section, briefly outlined the networking requirements needed to support the new shared data centre and the shared infrastructure services. Folk then used some free time to explore the complex infrastructure of the data centre from the 'Trigeneration' cooling to the high pressure - water vapour - fire suppression system.

The open afternoon provided the opportunity to see the data centre before the installation of the racks and technical equipment but it was also the first step in a programme to investigate the collegiate University's data centre requirements. The next step is to gather further requirements from you and some of you may have participated in the survey released a few days after the open afternoon. Your responses will be a great help with the continued planning of the USDC.



The USDC project team is currently scoping the fit-out of the data centre and the shared services that will be available to the whole University. I gather team members are keen to understand your requirements in relation to data storage and virtualisation services.

If you are keen to learn more about the USDC and the services it will offer you can contact the team at USDC@oucs.ox.ac.uk.

If you didn't manage to attend the open afternoon - take a look at the slide show of photographs available at: <http://www.oucs.ox.ac.uk/datacentres/southparksroad/events/28.01.2011.xml> or via this QR code.



You can find further information about the new University Shared Data Centre at:

<http://www.oucs.ox.ac.uk/datacentres/southparksroad/>



Dr Nigel Rudgewick-Brown
Director
IMSU, Medical Sciences Division

tall photo courtesy of Robert Zachlod

Mobile Oxford wins UCISA award 2011 for excellence!

Congratulations to the Mobile Oxford Team on winning the much-coveted UCISA award for excellence for their work on the mobile Oxford project. Currently m.ox.ac.uk is attracting a lot of international attention having been a finalist in the Learning Without Frontiers Innovation Awards 2011 and receiving the UK Nomination for the UN World Summit Award in Mobile (Education) 2010.



Mobile Oxford provides many innovative services not only for the staff and students of Oxford but for all our City's citizens. If you haven't visited it yet you definitely should. Just use the QR code here or put m.ox.ac.uk in any browser.

You must check out the transport page and the amazing location-specific information it has to offer. The award will be received on behalf of Oxford University at the UCISA Management Conference in Edinburgh later this month.



ICTF provides a framework that promotes and facilitates excellence through collaboration 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>