Minutes of a meeting of the Administrative Support Panel
Held on Thursday 3rd December at 2:30pm in room GS15

Present were: Dr. M. Kuhn (Chairman), Dr. A. Beresford, Mr. N. Cutler (Secretary), Mr. I. Davies, Ms. L. Gough, Dr. C. Hadley, Mr. B. Jones, Mrs. M. Levitt, Ms. C. Northeast.

1. Welcome and terms of reference

Dr. Kuhn Welcomed the panel members to the initial meeting. He outlined the remit of the panel to review and coordinate administrative processes and facilities within the Department, with a particular focus on improving the use of information technology (such as shared databases and web services) to support teaching, student administration, admissions and research.

2. Lecture theatre audio/visual equipment

It was reported by Mrs. Levitt that, in exchange for space on the second floor, management of the lecture theatres may be taken over centrally. In which case, the provision of audio/visual equipment would similarly become the responsibility of a central body. Thus, while some concerns relating to this were discussed, it was not possible to take the matter further at this stage.

3. Library matters

Mr. Cutler reported that the subscription to the IEEE/IET Electronic Library (IEL) had been renewed for a further year. The cost of upgrading from the journals only subscription was being shared between the Computer Laboratory and the Department of Engineering for the present year. A further price increase next year may change the situation.

The possibility of relocating part of the library to the 2nd floor alongside the Intel Lab was also discussed. This had been motivated in part by the need to show that space in the building was being well used, and that the existing library space could be better used for other applications. It was felt that space for 130 students and demonstrators would be needed during Java practicals due to constraints in the timetable. Equally, the library had been well used this term with all spaces occupied at times. It was resolved that Mr. Cutler would pursue the question of the floor loadings with Building Services.

4. Review of departmental databases

Dr. Kuhn reported on the use of databases within the department, most of which were built on Microsoft's SQL Server, with Visual Basic and ASP frontends. The present situation and some of the problems this causes are summarised in his discussion paper at:

http://www.cl.cam.ac.uk/~mgk25/admin-support/databases.html

Dr. Kuhn invited the technical members of the panel to review this discussion paper and familiarise themselves with the suggested tools, and offered to build 1-2 demonstration applications in the coming weeks. Subject only to concerns about the timescale for doing so, and the risk of adding further complexity, the suggestion was accepted.

5. Main Web site

It was reported that although the main Web site was working well, there was some need to revise its structure in places. Also there was a possibility of changing to the new University house style. Although there were mixed feelings the new house style, no major changes were needed to the website at this stage and no decisions were taken.

6. CamTools

Some Part 1A students and one Director of Study had asked if the Department could use CamTools, although it was not clear what functionality was required. for communicating course materials. Dr. Kuhn reported that he had generated CamTools course sites for each of the six main student groups, and that he would liaise with Ms. Northeast to populate each of these with links to relevant materials on our website and then add all the students as members. CamTools has various add-ons for a course site so there is some room for experimentation.

At present CamTools is purely interactive, making automatic configuration from departmental databases difficult. Dr. Kuhn was told by Centre for Applied Research in Educational Technologies (CARET) that this is likely to improve in the software that will replace CamTools next year.

There was a brief discussion on whether we should aim to auto-generate CamTools sites for each of the courses we teach next year. The panel felt it would be more helpful if those lecturers who are interested in having a course site on CamTools would ask CARET to create these on an individual basis, and that we should provide guidance on how to do this.

7. Next meeting

It was agreed that the panel would aim to meet again in the 3rd week of January, with the exact date to be determined nearer the time.

The meeting closed at approximately 4pm.