Computer Laboratory IT Strategy Group

Chairman: Prof. Peter Robinson

Secretary: Ms Lise Gough

Minutes of the inaugural meeting convened on Wednesday, 22 February 2006 in GC22 at the William Gates Building.

Present:
Prof. L.C. Paulson  Prof. P. Robinson  Dr R.J. Gibbens
Dr M.A. Johnson  Dr I. Lewin  Dr I. Lewis
Dr S.W. Moore  Dr G. Titmus  Ms L.M. Gough
Mr D. Cottingham

1. Welcome
The Chairman thanked the members for volunteering their services and time to the IT Strategy Group.

2. Policy
The Chairman explained that the purpose of the Group is to determine how it might help IT Support Services in the Computer Laboratory, to focus on strategy and not management, and to take a broad and long-term view.

i. Discussion of general principles
It was agreed that the Group needs to establish its general principles and terms of reference. Dr Lewis agreed to provide the Chairman with the remit of the IT Syndicate from which the IT Strategy Group’s policy statement and general principles might be based. This would include amongst other elements the composition of the group, terms of membership and duties.
It was agreed that part of the remit should be that the Group would provide an annual report to the Faculty Board. It was noted that the term “policy” would be used in the sense of objectives rather than rules.
Discussions should be informed by papers circulated in advance, and detailed planning would be delegated to working parties.

ii. Management of budgets
It was agreed that discussion of future requirements would need to be informed by a financial framework. PR and MAJ agreed to liaise with Accounts to look at budgets and the pooling of resources.

iii. Priorities for development
It was agreed there was a need to draw up an IT strategy and then to maintain that strategy. Requirements from users should be prioritised within the resources available.
It was also agreed that there was a need to ensure a portfolio fit for purpose.

3. Management
i. Staff development for COs and possible secondments
It was noted that the Computer Laboratory has had a poor record for staff development apart from programmes for research students.
It was agreed that there was a need to budget time for IT Support Staff development: it was suggested that between two and five days per annum would be ideal and that development would be embodied within the appraisal system. MAJ agreed to check for suitable courses. It was also agreed that the Group should be prepared to defend MAJ when staff attend staff development training and to provide the budget. Dr Lewis was asked to provide statistics for staff development within the Computing Service.

It was noted that as IT Support was leanly staffed, outgoing secondments were tricky. It was also noted that it might be possible to second people into the department. It was also noted that assistance with fixed-term projects in either direction could be beneficial.

ii. Associating COs with research groups for front-line support
It was noted that two Computer Officers were now based within research groups but that the scheme was not mandatory. Though this provides better ‘visibility’ of Computer Officers, MAJ noted that problems solved outside the ticketing system do not benefit all COs’ knowledge base.

4. Service policies
i. Initial thoughts about facilities provided
It was noted that the installation of a new file server was essentially a CPU upgrade of approximately £120k, providing online backup and more than double space. The migration was desirable by the end of March but any slippage would result in an installation at the end of April. MAJ noted that there might be problems of down-time to users but the Chairman agreed that MAJ’s intention to ask users about worst times was the correct procedure.

The Chairman asked for a written report on issues ii. network connections for visitors, and iii. remote access to the Laboratory infrastructure.

iv. Provision for research students
The Chairman noted that the specified level of machine for research students should be reviewed annually.

v. Support for the Digital Technology Group
MAJ said that a form of convergence had been reached with the DTG but that IT Support recognised the group’s desire for a certain amount of independence. DC agreed to provide a note summarising outstanding issues for consideration at the next meeting.

vi. Overhaul of the Laboratory’s Web site
LMG agreed to liaise with Dr Kuhn about the Laboratory’s Web site. DC was also co-opted to this role.

Induction procedures, support for teaching, document formats, and support for administrative staff will be discussed at a future meeting.

5. Date of next meeting
The next meeting will be held on April 18th at 9.15 a.m. in GC22 of the William Gates Building.