Computer Laboratory IT Strategy Group

Chairman: Prof. Peter Robinson                                          Secretary: Ms Lise Gough

Minutes of the meeting convened on April 18th 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. Terms of reference

The Group agreed that the Terms of reference of the IT Strategy Group should be to
- understand IT needs in the Computer Laboratory
- formulate and review policies for IT provision
- formulate a budget for provision of IT facilities
- establish priorities and allocate resources for the implementation of the policies
- promote and monitor adoption and implementation of the policies
- set rules for the use of IT facilities
- report annually to the Faculty Board of Computer Science and Technology

2. Budget

IT was explained that there are two accounts that pay for IT support: one for computers and communications, and one for the maintenance of equipment. These are funded by an Allocation from HEFCE. It was agreed that new budgets should be established to provide a more realistic allocation.

It was agreed that:
- areas of anticipated capital expenditure should be identified.
- it should be determined how much Computer Laboratory infrastructure is funded by research grants.
- the Group should determine what provision of equipment is appropriate for the different member groups in the Laboratory, the frequency of renewal and level of machine.
- an allowance for staff costs should be made within the minimum allocation.

Research Students: it was agreed that MAJ would provide an inventory of equipment currently allocated to research students before the Group establishes a new minimum standard across the spectrum. It was also noted that new research students though are given the choice of either Windows or Linux machines some cannot decide and use dual-boot machines or have two machines operating concurrently. The new Xen virtual machine monitor, capable of running more than one system, should reduce the need for more than one machine but will drive up the required specification cost. The Group agreed that a minimum software package should be included within the allocation for new research students.

Academic Staff: it was agreed that new academic staff will be allocated the minimum standard of machine with the presumption that research grants will generate new machines in the future.

Computer Officers: it was noted that Computer Officers tended to be reluctant to spend resources of their own needs and tended to scavenge for upgrade material. It was agreed that there is a need to add appropriate needs to the overall budget.

MAJ
Other users:
MPhil Students: the Head of Teaching is to prepare a document outlining overall teaching needs including those of MPhil students.
Research Assistants and Associates: should have needs met under research grants.
Visitors: should be provided with a reasonable quality of machine provided by funding from bench fees, or the sponsor should make a case for a better than standard allocation.

It was agreed that MAJ and GT will submit:
- a costing of providing the minimum specification of equipment
- a costing of the current provision
- a breakdown of the number of machines currently falling below the minimum specifications
- a paper of Xen and likely provision if required

3. Staff Training
IL reported that there were no available statistics about Staff Training within the Computing Service and that training continued on an ad hoc basis.
It was noted that there are similar cultural issues in the Computer Laboratory, and agreed that there was a need to encourage the appraisal process to identify areas of development.
It was noted that time was a major problem and that much training was through “learning by doing” and a suggestion that colleagues might shadow a computer officer in a new process was agreed to be good in principle.
It was agreed that there is not enough documentation available but noted that internally developed systems are generally harder to document.

It was agreed that it would be helpful if appraisal forms made explicit mention of staff development.

4. Services
i) File Server
MAJ reported that the upgrade to the file server went smoothly; that another small disruption would be needed for the cutover; and that the process was slightly behind schedule for the second mirroring to backup.

ii) Network connections
Visitor access: it was agreed to accept the risks of an open network and adopt a “wait and see” policy regarding potential problems such as the abuse of ISP user policy and overloading.
(Postscript May 4th 2006: MAJ announced the establishment of a new wireless network with ESSID “wgb.”)

iii) Digital Technology Group
DC presented a paper (attached).
It was agreed that twenty-five recurrent MatLab licences should be added to the IT support budget.
It was noted that there were issues with the Toolbox licences. GT will notify the costs.

iv) Web site
It was reported that Dr Kuhn is currently developing the Wolfson College site as practice for the Computer Laboratory site.

5. Minutes of last meeting
The minutes of the last meeting were agreed as an accurate record.

6. Date of next meeting
The next meeting will be held on June 6th at 2.15 p.m. in GS15 of the William Gates Building.