Minutes of the meeting convened on January 15th 2007 in GC22 at the William Gates Building.

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

1. Apologies for absence
Apologies were received from Dr I Lewin.

2. Budget
It was noted that there were problems associated in planning budgets over the longer term. The current method of using the remainder of equipment budgets for infrastructure from research grants was agreed to be unsatisfactory. The group considered the possibilities of taking a proportion from new grants or delegating to Computer Officers control over the equipment budget in each grant for its duration. SWM noted that in EPSRC grants, for example, equipment grants are only given for large pieces of equipment. Other equipment is covered under consumables. He also noted that other institutions leased equipment from a central core of equipment. LCP noted that this would need to be done in such a way that funding bodies such as the EPSRC would agree the costs. It was noted that difficulties lay in the extraction of funds from grants to be used as a central funding body and the real problems lay with the existing financial system. There was also the problem of uncertainty about the outcome of grant proposals making forecasting difficult. It was noted that research councils require that invoices can be produced against grant allocations for equipment. It was agreed that people are happy to delegate to the Computer Officers but that there are details which will differ depending upon the research council funding each grant. It was agreed that a policy of adding a share of central facilities to grants would be recommended to the department; the matter is to be discussed at a Wednesday meeting.

MAJ, PR and SWM agreed to draft a statement in consultation with the Departmental Secretary for Finance for discussion at the next meeting.

3. Services
The group was invited to consider how the remit of IT Support might be extended to include technical building services such as telephones, security, video conferencing and audio-visual aids, and what priority these should take. It was noted that much of the work carried out in these areas is currently on the periphery of the Computer Officers’ duties and there are no staff dedicated to the various tasks.

It was noted that the telephone system is due to be replaced in the next two years; the building security system is also in need of replacement with a preference for the University Card access system.

i) Telephony
It was agreed that IT Support will be looking after telephones, will be involved in the replacement of the telephone system and that it should be given a high priority. MAJ will report back to the Group whether more staff would be required.

ii) Security
It was noted that the current security system was managed by one Computer Officer and that while it would be helpful to delegate the management to Building Services, the elaborate infrastructure means that IT Support is best placed to deal with the system. The poor software managing the COTAG system also makes it hard to delegate the role.

It was noted that a major concern with delegating the security system was the fielding of responsibility for problems arising out-of-hours. It was noted that it was desirable to integrate security with other software systems and that therefore IT Support would be required to continue managing the system.

iii) Video conferencing

It would be hoped that day-to-day running of the AV and video conferencing facilities could be handed over to Building Services with support from IT Support for higher level problems.

iv) Resource implications

It was noted that it was too early to say whether there will be resource implications. It was also noted that some of the IT Support load, for example AV support, can be alleviated by an injection of capital expenditure. Likewise, there has been a proposal to more radically change the security system but may cost 70K: the system would use the University Card but replaces more than just the card readers. IT Support members have made site visits to examine the proposed system. It was agreed that the Group supports the further investigation of this proposal, that the costs would come from building maintenance and how much is available would need to be checked.

It may be necessary to make a case for making the temporary CO position permanent in order to cover security and telephony but not to be employed to field “front-line” queries. It was agreed that IT Support should take on these matters; it was noted that should complaints arise it would be the remit of the Group to address the order of priorities in which tasks were dealt.

4. Expectations

The group was invited to consider how to encourage appropriate expectations for IT services from staff and students. It was noted that there may be people in the Lab living with inferior equipment unaware that they could be asking for more.

It was agreed that the best method to ascertain the level of equipment available to staff and students is to circulate a message to Wednesday and also to notify students as to what they can expect as part of their induction.

5. Web site

It was noted that the new web system is running in parallel to the old. PR will approach MK regarding the content management system.

It was agreed that MK should be invited to present the system to the Group in the near future.

6. Wireless Access

IL explained that further to the minutes of the last meeting, the Computing Service are committed to the installation of Lapwing at the café, “West.” He further proposed that Lapwing should be put in the public areas of the Computer Laboratory to co-exist with the existing system of wireless access.

IL explained that Lapwing provides better generic student access with a reasonable bandwidth. Lapwing is a Raven authenticated system providing institutional reporting thereby allowing for the banning of users and the issuing of tickets for visitors which
would be enabled at Colleges and other departments. It was noted that the WGB public WiFi system was installed initially to serve visitors from outside the University. There was some concern about the amount of effort in delivering on to the existing access points. It was noted that it would be preferable to have a version of Lapwing access based on the customer equipment being attached to a VLAN. IL explained that this is in the pipeline. It was noted that IT Support is not aware how many users are using WGB system but the system was deliberately bought in with as little Lab support requirements as possible. It was agreed that while Lapwing services were attractive, the installation work required means that the Group is prepared to wait for the time being.

7. Induction

LMG presented the results of a survey of the thirty-five staff and students who arrived in the previous nine months. There were fifteen replies. The general consensus was that the induction procedures were good and that work would continue to improve them in the future including publishing information on the web. It was agreed that similar systems should be standardised for each intake of students, that is, October, January and April. It was agreed that much credit for the smooth induction of staff and students should go to the Reception staff.

8. Minutes of the last meeting

It was agreed that the minutes from the last meeting were an accurate record of the last meeting.

9. Next meeting

The next meeting will be held on April 27th 2007 at 11.15 in GC22.