Graduate Students’ Forum
Minutes: 13 May 2013

Attending: SB Simon Baker (MPhil)
            SMB Sandro Bauer (NLIP)
            LG Lise Gough
            VI Vaiva Imbrasaitne (Rainbow)
            AK Andreas Koltes (CompArch)
            RK Ramana Kumar (PLS) [Secretary]
            AR Andy Rice (GEC) [Chair]
            MS Malte Schwarzkopf (SRG)
            KS Kumar Sharad (Security)
            DT Daniel Thomas (DTG)
            IT Ivo Timoteo (AI&B)
            GT Graham Titmus (SysAdmin)

1. Apologies

Jon Crowcroft (JC). Matthew Grosvener (MG), with MS kindly substituting.

2. Minutes of last meeting

Approved.

3. Matters arising from the minutes

i. Sys-admin Issues Document.

   DT summarises the issues for GT, and we discuss.

   a. Compute

       Overheads of Condor are too high for short (hours) computing jobs. But we haven't
       found a better alternative. Quickly provisioning virtual machines to specifications
       would be great, but too labour intensive. AR: Support for short intensive jobs at
       a fixed specification would be worthwhile. MG: Do people need more than their
       desktop machine (e.g. overnight)? AR, SB: NLIP needs more than their desktops.
       MS: Amazaon EC2 gives free compute credits to researchers, and may be worth
       using (transport confidentiality requirements permitting).

       AR: The story so far is that every group is solving this problem their own ad-hoc
       way. GT: Would a central Hadoop service be worthwhile? MS: Anil has a license
       for a system that could be useful.

       Action: All to provide GT with a list of people with particular compute needs and
       how they are or are not already met.

   b. Storage

       GT: Now have funding from the School of Technology to upgrade Filer (for speed
       and size), and will address Big Disc after that. Size isn’t the only problem, it’s also
       bandwidth. The aim is to be upgraded by September.
Backups, especially automatic, can be difficult because of Kerberos. GT: We haven’t looked into supporting automatic or streaming backups before but should investigate now.

c. Snapshots
Can they be made not world-readable? MS: May contain sensitive data; find goes looking in them. GT: We don’t have control over the permissions. DT: The induction day should make clear that snapshotting is happening, and what the risks are. GT: Retention at induction day is not great; it would be better to make the webpages better.

d. Server Rooms
Screens and trolleys? GT: Would be great, though there’s not much room there. Update (DT): A trolley has been bought, and tried, and it’s great.

e. Faulty Hardware
Should not be given back or given to other people. GT: This shouldn’t have happened. AR: Instead of a clean install after a fault, perhaps swap hardware and diagnose the problem elsewhere.

f. Remote Boot and Login
Kerberos tickets expire randomly. SSH alias server sends you to another machine where you have to kinit again. GT: Need to clearly identify steps that can be taken to resolves various Kerberos situations and publish them.

g. Printing
Transparency in images in pdfs get printed as black squares. DT: Ancient version of Ghostscript somewhere that can’t handle it. Also, print queue sometimes silently discards jobs.

h. Laptops
MS: What is the policy on provision of machines: laptops or desktops? GT: No strong policy. MS: Perhaps should be an option on arrival alongside choosing OS.

ii. Unofficial PhD Guide.
AR has LaTeX source code for 2005 version (and no later version has been found). AR has asked Martyn Johnson for GSF group space, where the sources will go. They can be found at /usr/groups/phdguide/phdguide.git. SMB has looked at his sections and found various minor things to correct.
VI has not looked yet.

iii. Cutlery.
Rainbow group has good distinctive supply (and VI brought a sample). DT has bought plain supplies for DTG. Will do another spoon survey next year.

iv. Three Minute Thesis Lunches.
No volunteers have come forward within GSF to run these.

**Action:** All to email their group to find a volunteer.

4. **Departmental announcements**

**Action:** All to encourage their group to fill out the PRES and PTES (Postgraduate Research/Taught Experience Survey).

5. **Staff Student Consultative Forum (DT)**
   
i. **Windows.**
   
   We have been told to look at the website; the website says we are allowed to open the windows.
   
   ii. **Food.**
   
   The Maths department have had a similar problem with food quality, and no major success resolving it. The University’s preferred suppliers are the only food suppliers allowed to serve, and this is guaranteed by contract until 2015. Hence, it is a university-level problem. DT has contacted CUSU, but without much hope. There is a conflict of interest in that the person in charge of food for the university also runs the university catering company. Might need to organise boycotts or petitions. AR suggests talking to the GU, which DT will do when the new GU president arrives.

6. **Research Development**

Nothing to report. Will see what happens after University-wide meeting on Friday 17th.

7. **Student feedback**

   (a) **DTG (DT)**
   
   Nothing to report.
   
   (b) **CompArch (AK)**
   
   Nothing to report.
   
   (c) **PLS (RK)**
   
   Nothing to report.
   
   (d) **MPhil (SB)**
   
   Nothing to report.
   
   (e) **NLIP (SMB)**
   
   CL people want to attend courses on Management of Technology and Innovation, and think they are not allowed. But that is not true, they are allowed.
The printer for the NLIP group breaks repeatedly. AR suggests pointing this out to one’s supervisor as well as sys-admin.

(f) AI & Bioinformatics (IT)  
Nothing to report.

(g) Rainbow (VI)  
Nothing to report.

(h) Security (KS)  
Nothing to report.

(i) SRG (MS)  
Nothing to report.

8. Date of next meeting
June 27th for breakfast/brunch (10:30am).

9. Any other business
Food safety training to be organised by AR, DT, and VI.