

IT Strategy Committee  
11<sup>th</sup> March 2021 at 3 p.m. via Microsoft Teams

Minutes

Present:

Professor Simon Moore (SWM) - Chair  
Professor Alastair Beresford (ARB)  
Dr Stewart Carswell (SC)  
Graham Hatt (GH)  
Professor Mateja Jamnik (MJ)

Dr Rafal Mantiuk (RF)  
Andreas Vlachos (AV)  
Jo de Bono (JD) - Secretary

**1. Apologies for absence**

None.

**2. Approval of the Minutes of the Previous Meeting**

Unconfirmed Minutes of the meeting held on 16<sup>th</sup> February 2021 were approved.

**3. Matters Arising/Actions from the Previous Meeting**

(a) *Terms of Reference (Item 3)*

ARB confirmed that the HoD has approved raising the threshold for purchasing from 20K to 25K. ARB to request the HoD to inform the Finance department of the revised amount.

(b) *Future Agendas (Item 5)*

*i) To consider future agendas (longstanding items in addition to exceptional items)?*

Revisit and reassess regularly the biggest demand for computing resources for each course and how the demand can be best managed.

MJ reported that the aim is to have a mechanism in place by the end of the year for the next academic year 2022/23 and agreed to bring the item back to the next meeting.

**Action: MJ**

(c) *Planning/Future Needs (Item 7)*

*ii) To decide upon the mechanism for communicating needs to the Committee.*

All Committee Members were requested to reflect on mechanisms for communicating needs to the Committee and bring suggestions back to the next meeting.

The Chair raised the idea of a Suggestions Box (Item 5 below) – a webform linked to the IT Strategy Committee page on the intranet (for comments on IT strategy and infrastructure needs).

RM pointed out that there are already multi ways of reaching sys-admin (web form & email) and in the interests of keeping things simple it was not necessary to have a dedicated webform box for IT strategy comments. Furthermore it would be better for sys-admin to do the vetting and forward strategic level requests to the Committee

as there would potentially be lots of day-to-day operational requests that were not appropriate for the Committee (MJ). Suggestions could also be publicly solicited at the Wednesday Meeting (ARB),

JD raised a general concern about appropriate response times from sys-admin and suggested that it would be helpful to discuss the 'helpdesk' at a future meeting, particularly in terms of response times for day-to-day operational needs.

GH reported that sys-admin requests are generally operational (occasionally more strategic). GH clarified that sys-admin currently has multiple queues (i.e purchasing, windows, sys-admin). A suggestion is that everything that comes into sys-admin could be triaged (GH/MS) and separated into the different categories. Strategic comments should be forwarded to the Committee for consideration.

ARB raised the point that it might be helpful if people were aware that there are different email addresses for the queues (maybe 4) and used them. This was agreed by GH.

It was agreed to add this as an item to the agenda at the next meeting and to consider sys-admin response times and the general workflow.

**Action: JD**

Furthermore, the Committee's remit is to look operational issues - do we have sufficient support staff, do we have appropriate staff in the right areas and also potentially to think about training. Is there is a clearly identified need for another member(s) of staff and how does this fit in with the needs process? How can the Committee help with the needs process.

It was agreed to add this as an item for the agenda of the next meeting.

**Action: JD**

- (d) *Future email strategy: Needs consideration due to Hermes reaching end-of-life (Item 8)*

The Chair reported that an initial email survey had been drafted (Item 6) which was circulated to Dr Richard Clayton and Professor Richard Mortier who had been on the University's Advisory Group for feedback.

The aim of the survey is to try and determine patterns of usage within the department. Do we want anything changed or does it capture most of what we want? Are we asking the right questions? We need to figure out whether the department needs to provide an email provision that is independent to UIS post-hermes. The Chair invited comments from the Committee Members and the draft document was discussed.

In summary:

- Provide a FAQ sheet.
- Provide some background information before people complete the survey (explain what Hermes 'end-of-life' means and how this will affect people/what the impact will be).
- Add the question – 'What space do you currently use?' instead of 'space required for your email'.

- Will the survey be anonymous? The information is not sensitive and it might be helpful to be able to follow up – optionally provide crsid.
- It might be helpful to capture people's role and look at patterns.
- With the email client, might want to breakout a few of the popular IMAT clients explicitly (macmail, thunderbird, other) because as UIS has checked the sum of those clients.
- Add [firstname.surname@cst.cam.ac.uk](mailto:firstname.surname@cst.cam.ac.uk).
- GDPR issue.

It was agreed that the department does not want to run an in-house email service but that this does not preclude some other third party service if it was felt that this was important. One question for UIS is can we have gmail on cam.ac.uk? This would be interesting to follow up in principle.

The Chair agreed to make the slight revisions to the survey and to include a pro-forma explaining the background and then circulate to the Committee Members for their feedback.

SWM to follow-up with a few members of the Committee to look at alternative options for an external buy-in service and report back to the Committee.

**ACTION: SWM**

(e) *GPU Resources for Teaching (Item 9)*

*To consider GPU resources for machine learning and teaching.*

All Members to bring concrete numbers in terms of resources to the next meeting.

RM proposed that it would be extremely useful if we had a research skills unit to explain how to use the GPUs efficiently and to advise what is available. A webpage informing MPhil students how to apply for GPUs would be helpful. Furthermore, it was agreed that buying a lot of GPUs would not be a solution in terms of scalability and proposed instead to allocate some of the budget to alternative options (for example google cloud, etc). It was agreed that MPhils could develop on CPU and the department could equip the MPhil computer with less expensive GPUs.

Item 7 below was discussed - how do we make sure we have appropriate GPUs for teaching?

GH proposed to discuss with MS and document what is available currently and what are the possible future options (e.g. Azure). GH agreed to bring this back to the next meeting.

ARB reported that ??? model seems to be how the whole industry is moving towards.

**ACTION: GH/MS**

AV/MJ to investigate what numbers are needed for teaching next year (across the different courses) to help determine need and to bring data back to the next meeting.

**ACTION: MJ/AV**

#### **4. Standing Items**

- (a) MS and GH to provide an update on current issues.  
GH updated the Committee on current issues.

- (b) Report on the School's IT Strategy Committee and update from UIS.  
Nothing to report.

**5. 'Suggestion Box'**

The Committee to review the idea of an IT Strategy 'Suggestion Box'.

The idea of an IT Strategy 'suggestion box' on the Committee's page on the intranet was reviewed. The Committee decided however not to go ahead with this suggestion.

**6. Future email strategy**

Needs consideration due to Hermes reaching end-of-life.

The Committee to consider carrying out a survey to ascertain the view that is representative of the department as a whole.

Discussed above.

**7. Resources for Teaching**

To consider GPU resources for machine learning and teaching.

(i) The Committee to ascertain what resources will be needed for MPhil teaching and projects and PhDs and to make recommendations.

(ii) The Committee to discuss further what resources the department has from a research point of view and how they are allocated, and if resources are generally available from the department or are more tied to particular projects/research teams.

Discussed above.

**8. Funding for shared computer infrastructure (donations, etc.)**

Item brought forward from the last meeting.

The Chair enquired if the Committee was aware of any infrastructure bids within the University or any other funding. GH agreed to check with James Matheson (SoT IT Business Manager, UIS) and report back to the Committee. ARB reported that the Teaching Support Fund provided by the University is currently still available for unexpected costs related to teaching due to covid.

**Action: GH**

**9. Any other business**

There was no other business.

**10. Date of next meeting**

It was agreed that the next meeting would be held during Easter Term.

**Action: JD**