

IT Strategy Committee  
5<sup>th</sup> October 2021 at 11 a.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)  
Malcolm Scott (MS)  
Dr Andreas Vlachos (AV)  
Ms Jo de Bono (JD) - Secretary

**1. Apologies for absence**

Apologies were received from Dr Abraham Martin.

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

Unconfirmed Minutes of the meeting held on 27<sup>th</sup> May 2021 were approved.

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

(a) *GPU Resources for Teaching (Item 3a)*

The Committee discussed the proposal that had been circulated by MJ. The proposal recommends the use of in-house GPUs. The initial outlay is expensive but provides the most flexibility. The proposal also recommends the use of cloud resources.

The brief is to provide a service to give students the best possible environment so that they can do the highest quality research projects within reason in terms of cost.

ARB confirmed that the department will receive money for Masters' students above a certain threshold (but due to drop in numbers this year there will not be any direct revenue stream from the programme). It is hoped to have a direct revenue stream post-pandemic.

The Committee agreed that a set of price points was needed. The Chair also recommended that an indicative budget would be needed.

Decision points:

1. Continue for this academic year with the facilities available in the department and use the HPC.

2. Refine the proposal with a clear set of price points. Liaise with the HoD to explore the budget and finance options in order to provide the facility for the next academic year.

**ACTION:** ARB to liaise with MS/MJ to ensure that the correct data is in the proposal. The Chair to put forward the proposal to the HoD and to seek approval to proceed.

(b) *Funding for shared computer infrastructure (Item 3b)*

GH to provide a timeline from James Matheson of upcoming UIS infrastructure project bids.

GH reported that the process is ongoing and he has an upcoming meeting with James Matheson to view higher level projects.

**ACTION:** GH to report back at the next meeting.

(c) *Review of the email survey (Item 5)*

SWM agreed to set up a working group to review the department's future email strategy. SWM to give an update on the findings of the working group and to report on next steps.

As discussed at the last meeting, the department was surveyed and it was concluded that the majority of people are content to move to Microsoft exchange/exchange online. There are a significant number of lecturing staff however who are unwilling to do so. MS investigated alternative options and it was agreed that the department will set up a mail transfer agent to provide a mechanism to redirect email to cst and cl email addresses. The provision will also support a mailbox. It was agreed that the department does not wish to run an in-house service. MS proposed that the department uses Fastmail and this was agreed by the Committee.

A policy decision will be needed on who will have access. ARB proposed that staff members can ask for access; and PhDs/Postdocs need to ask their PI or supervisor to send an email to request access.

**ACTION:** The Chair/MS to put forward the proposal to the HoD for approval. If the funding is approved, MS to proceed with Fastmail. The Chair to report to Wednesday.

(d) *Laptop by default for PhD students (Item 6)*

GH/MS to provide 2/3 laptop specs for PhD students and order supply of laptops to ensure that they are stock at the beginning of the academic year. GH/MS to confirm that a mechanism is in place.

It is proposed that at the beginning of each academic year all new students will be contacted to ask what they require. Many students elect to use their own machines until they know what they want or defer the decision until they arrive in the department. Supervisors will be contacted to check that funds are available on the grants.

ARB proposed that the budget of £800-£1000 should be announced.

It was also noted that ergonomics and with the change in the way people are working (hybrid/mobile) home kit needs are an important consideration.

MS raised the idea of a set up kit that is standardized on every desk with a connector so any modern laptop could be plugged in and work. The department should be funding as part of the move to laptops by default and could be phased in as new students start. However, at the cost of £500 per desk this was deemed to be very expensive.

**ACTION:** It was agreed to review the process at the next meeting and to ensure that the policy is up-to-date on the website (GH/MS).

- (e) *Sys-admin (Item 7)*  
GH/JD agreed to discuss sys-admin response times. GH to provide an update on the review of the ticketing system, in particular expected response timeframes.

GH reviewed the ticketing system and reported that it is not being managed effectively and does not operate as it should do. There are currently over 900 open tickets. GH and Mark Cresham have started to try and triage tickets. A plan is in place and it is expected that the situation will improve in a few months' time.

**ACTION:** ARB to report to Wednesday.

- (f) *Operational Issues (Item 8)*  
SWM/MS/GH agreed to review CO staffing level needs. SWM to update Committee Members on the progress of the IT Support Planning Document.

The Chair reported that staffing levels had been reviewed and a proposal to increase the number of CO staff had been approved by the HoD. The proposal will now go the School's Needs Committee.

**ACTION:** The Chair to report back to the Committee on the decision of the Needs Committee.

#### 4. Standing Items

- (a) *MS and GH to provide an update on current issues.*  
It was reported that the pool of research GPUs is suffering hardware issues which MS is investigating but this means that there is currently a shortage of research GPUs in addition to the shortage of MPhil GPUs. MS is actively looking at what can be done to mitigate the problem.
- (b) *Report on the School's IT Strategy Committee and update from UIS.*  
It was reported that Andrea Vlachos is now a member of the School's IT Strategy Committee.

#### 5. GDPR

There is a need for a departmental strategy for managing personal data. It is suggested that Professor Alastair Beresford, Graham Hatt and Caroline Stewart form a working group to conduct a review. The IT Strategy Committee are asked to consider what is needed from such a review and provide the working group brief terms of reference and expected output (e.g. policy statement / report etc.).

ARB reported that the Working Group has not yet been formed. ARB and GH agreed to draft terms of reference.

**ACTION:** ARB to report at the next meeting.

#### 6. GN09 Usage

Discuss GN09 usage in the context of COVID and report to the Buildings and Environment Committee.

MS reported that very few people had requested access to GN09 during the pandemic so no conflict had arisen.

**7. Any other business**

There was no other business.

**8. Date of next meeting**

End of Lent Term 2021/22.