Computing Strategy Group Minutes

29th October 2021

Present: Jane Hillston, Joy Candlish, Alastair Scobie, Bjorn Franke, Ajitha Rajan, Tim Colles, Petros Wallden

Apologies: Boris Grot

	Summary	ACTION
1.	**PREVIOUS MEETING**	
	Approval of previous minutes and matters arising Actions completed from previous meeting where discussed and agreed.	
	1.1 - School access to self-managed compute resources - No paper produced yet (will do for next time) but ground work underway. Could use JAMF for MacBooks as this does key escrow. Reviewing impact but should be minimal and looks feasible to mandate as very lightweight. No equivalent for Linux self-managed machines, so might just have to do spot checks here or equivalent. Craig Strachan visiting academic staff and asking how they store data but do need to reach people that aren't self-selecting. Jane says there is a big College push on data security - many people have not done mandatory online courses for example. Would be nice to isolate T&D staff from this list as they don't all handle student data. Maybe add this into the PDR. Mar21: Alastair reported that the original motivation for this has reduced as we now encrypt new Apple Mac devices, and record the FileVault keys, before distributing to staff/students. Aug21 : Alastair has been looking at the Managed Mac platform, with a view to mandating this for all new Macs. This would give the School oversight over the versions of software installed and would enforce encryption. Existing Macs could be simply migrated to JAMF at a later stage. Mac users would still have 'admin' rights so would retain ability to add and configure software. Oct21: With more use of JAMF have noticed issue with battery life - suspect poor interaction between Sophos anti-virus and BigSur (Sophos is mandated by JAMF). Issue under investigation - proposal delayed. [ACTION: Alastair (to produce paper and demo JAMF)]	**AS**
	1.2 - Tier 4 monitoring - EUCLID not due for replacement till 2025. Student immigration get data out of EUCLID via API. Timetabling doesn't work for us due to no access for TSP staff. Using coursework, exam, and attendance at lectures with Tophat. Tophat download to EUCLID upload conversion proven to work in principle. Now just needs an easy to use interface for ISS. Aug21: Tim to discuss with Gillian Bell to determine what is required. Oct21: Tim had discussed with Gillian - issue not currently relevant as no large lectures in S1, but Tim will add to teaching admin list. May be required for semester 2. Tophat may be replaced in future. Done.	**JC**
	1.3 - Providing information on funded research grants to Computing	

team - Information to computing from Janet's team. Tim, Joy and Alastair will meet to discuss how we could improve on this.
[ACTION: Joy (to ask Lorna to schedule)]

1.4 - Draft Computing plan for 2021 - discussion
Bjoern suggested that we should seek to reduce the number of submission systems in use. It was agreed that Bjoern would form a working group to make recommendations. Mar21: Bjorn reported that Gradescope will be the default for the forthcoming exam diet and is licenced to the end of the calendar year. The group membership has been defined, but has not yet met.
Aug21: Bjoern reported that the group will start meeting in October 21.
Oct21: Bjoern reported had not been possible to meet prior to October CSG, but a meeting has been scheduled. Tim and Bjoern to look back at previous work done by Stuart Anderson and Paul Anderson. This action will, in future, be monitored as part of working group reports.
Done

JC/AS

1.5 Forum server rooms - Jane and Boris have been discussing our needs with Mark Parsons (EPCC). Jane, Joy and Alastair are meeting with SRS. It was noted that at least one of the CDTs has considerable funds to spend on computing OpEx, but not CapEx - we should investigate creating an SRF (Small Research Facility). Additional potential spaces were suggested for housing servers - these will be investigated. Oct 21: this action predates the EIDF proposal. Alastair and Joy to consider whether SRF still required. Janet and Mark Parsons are discussing how charging might work for EIDF.
[ACTION: Joy / Alastair (to consider how to create an SRF)]

AS/BG

Aug21 - The School has agreed with EPCC the hosting of School GPU provision at EIDF. There are a lot of details to be worked out, particularly the financial model. The intention is to have paid for and free tiers. A high performance storage system will be available across all GPUs. It was commented that we need to start informing PIs of this so that they can begin to factor this into new research grant proposals. Oct21 - Alastair has been trying to arrange a meeting with EPCC to discuss the proposed EIDF facility in greater detail. Once he has more detail, he will be asking the School's EIDF working group to disseminate information within the institutes.
[ACTION: Alastair / Boris]

AS

Aug21 - The University has allocated some capital funds to improve the cooling in the Forum server rooms. The first step is for Estates to engage a contractor to produce a feasibility study.
Oct21 - Estates have contracted a consultancy firm to produce the feasibility study. The consultancy firm met with Estates and School reps in late September to discuss requirements. The consultancy firm will undertake an on-site survey in early November and produce a report by early December.
[ACTION: Alastair]

1.6 ISG/Informatics relationship - As we are increasingly making use of ISG services, it makes sense for us to improve our dialogue with ISG - both for ISG to inform us of forthcoming developments and for the School to provide ISG with feedback on our use of ISG services. Alastair will

AS

investigate how other schools manage such dialogue.

Aug21 - Alastair had discussed this with the College IT Strategy and Engagement officer (Victoria Dishon) and the School's IS relationship manager (Angus Rae). Neither felt that it was appropriate, or viable, for the IS relationship manager to attend the School's CSG meeting. Joy suggested that the IS Director of User Services (Gosia Such) be invited to periodic CSG meetings for constructive dialog and that the IS Chief Information Officer (Gavin McLachlan) be invited to periodic general meetings to hear more general feedback from the School. Alastair will ask both if they are willing to attend. He will also create a standing agenda item to report back at CSG meetings on IS developments. Oct21: Angus Rae has suggested inviting IS directors on a rotational basis, rather than Gosia Such. Alastair will invite Tony Weir to attend a research-focused CSG meeting.
[ACTION: Alastair]

AS

1.7 Age of GPUs in taught student cluster - As the MLP cluster is only needed by the MLP exercise during part of the year, it makes sense to make it available to others to use for the rest of the year. However, the current GPUs in the cluster have too little memory (only 6GB) to be of any use to most researchers. It was suggested that we could replace some of the GPUs in the cluster with more powerful GPUs with significantly more memory. Alastair will investigate the feasibility of doing this. One concern is that this may necessitate a reduction in the total number of GPUs in the cluster.

TC

Aug21 - Alastair reported that whilst Iain Rae had concluded that replacing the GPUs should be possible, it hadn't been possible to procure any of the commodity GPUs that we typically buy. Boris suggested that we investigate data grade GPUs - procuring these via EPCC/EIDF might be faster than open market. Oct21 - Alastair will ask Mark Parsons whether EIDF could be used for MLP and taught student projects - if the answer is yes, contributing to EIDF might be a better use of funds.
[ACTION: Alastair]

Oct21 - Bjoern remarked that a new vision course might need to use the taught student GPU cluster. Tim will discuss with Ram Ramamoorthy and Laura Sevilla.
[ACTION: Tim]

1.8 Preparedness for Semester 1 - remaining actions :-

- Guidance re personal equipment (eg laptops)
  - o Continue recommending students bringing laptop...
    - Does our wording need updated?
      - Explain that desktops are available...
      - Action: Tim will check / update wording
      - Done.
  - o University laptop scheme
    - Action: Alastair to check whether still running
    - Oct21: still in place for both short term and medium term loans - documented in computing.help.inf.ed.ac.uk
- Introduction to DICE lecture
  - o Learn course - has been revised
    - Action: Alastair to check that learn course is referenced

AS

	from computing.help.inf.ed.ac.uk
	    ▪ Done.
	  • IT support
	    o Action: Alastair to check whether IS mobile clinics running...
	    o Oct21: IS did not run the IS mobile clinics, but hopefully next year.
	    o Should we have a piazza mechanism for student support - particularly self help
	      ▪ Action: Alastair to check this referenced from computing.help.inf.ed.ac.uk
	      ▪ Oct21: Bjoern suggested asking the student support group whether they feel that this would be useful	

2.	**Updates from working groups** Updates as per tabled paper A. Teaching admin - Ajitha asked how lecturers being able to update extensions will impact on workflow. Tim replied that changes over the last two years have made the workflow inefficient. He is aiming to review and improve. Bjoern commented that we are trying to make course enrolment much easier. Have been using 'path' but that just sends email to the Personal Tutor. Could we feed course choices made in 'path' according to the DPMT directly into EUCLID as course registrations? Tim and Bjoern to spec. [ACTION: Tim / Bjoern] Server room group - a list of all servers, by institute, has been given to DoIs to validate and suggest machines that could be retired.	**TC/BF**
3.	**Head of Computing update** Updates as per tabled paper B	
4.	**Internal Audit report on CSE CyberSecurity and recommendations** The tabled papers C & D were discussed. A working group, of Joy, Petros and Alastair, will be formed to produce a plan for addressing the recommendations proposed in paper D. Joy will convene. [ACTION: Joy]	**JC**
5.	**SWOT analysis** Alastair will produce a SWOT analysis for Computing. [ACTION: Alastair]	**AS**
6.	**Report from CLISC** Petros gave a verbal report from the most recent CLISC which covered topics such as the Internal Audit on CyberSecurity, library issues, open	

	source text books and hybrid learning. He will produce written reports for future CSG meetings.	
7.	**AOB** Alastair will email all staff to explain that he is the escalation contact for IS services. He has a monthly meeting with Angus Rae from the IS Relationship Management team [ACTION: Alastair]	**AS**
8.	**Date of next meeting:** 11:00 am 10th December 2021	