



Computing Strategy Group Minutes

8th February 2022

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

Apologies: None

	Summary	ACTION
1.	PREVIOUS MEETING	
	<p>Approval of previous minutes and matters arising Actions completed from previous meeting where discussed and agreed.</p>	
	<p>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. Alastair (to produce paper and demo JAMF) - done.</p> <p>1.2 - 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)]</p> <p>1.3 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. Feb 22: still waiting on clarity on how EIDF will be charged for. Sitting with Director</p>	<p>JC</p> <p>JC/AS</p>

of Finance.

[ACTION: Joy / Alastair (to consider how to create an SRF)]

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 Pls 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. Feb 22: Two Informatics researchers are piloting the EIDF facility. [ACTION: Alastair / Boris]

AS/BG

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.

Feb22 - The final report produced three costed options. The first to add 6 HPC racks (with in-rack cooling) in IF-B.02, the second to add 14 HPC racks in IF-B.02 and the third to locate 14 HPC racks in the Water Tank Room IF-B.Z21. All three proposals were in excess of £1m. Subsequently the consultancy firm proposed a value-engineered option with no power or cooling resiliency (for the additional racks). The feasibility of this option is being considered with estates and the COs - could it realistically be a first stage option, with power and cooling resiliency being added at a future date.

[ACTION: Alastair]

AS

1.4 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 investigate how other schools manage such dialogue.

AS

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. Feb22: Tony has agreed to meet with CSG. Alastair to schedule a one-off meeting.

[ACTION: Alastair]

1.5 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.

AS

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. Feb22 - Alastair reported that Rob Baxter and Mark Parsons thought that such teaching use was consistent with EIDF goals and that they are happy to consider this use. However, this would require the EIDF team to add support for splitting the A100 GPUs into smaller virtual GPUs, and this functionality won't be available in the near future.

[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. Feb 21: Tim had discussed with Laura who reckoned that there were no current plans to use the cluster.

Done.

1.6 Preparedness for Semester 1 - remaining actions :-

- 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

TC/BF

Alastair reported that the front line computing support team had used Piazza for A.Y. 20/21 with little engagement from the students. It was agreed that we should drop this.

Done.

1.7 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

AS

	<p>spec. Feb22: Bjoern reported that this was being considered as part of the overall student support scheme. Tim has been investigating and it covered by the hybrid teaching plan. Have a meeting in the next week with ISG to scope what is feasible. Trying to find a solution which would be useful for many schools. [ACTION: Tim / Bjoern]</p> <p>1.8 Internal Audit report on CSE CyberSecurity and recommendations - 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. Feb22: Joy reported that the group had met. Report in section 2, below. Done.</p> <p>1.9 SWOT analysis - Alastair will produce a SWOT analysis for Computing. Feb22: This was presented at Dec 21 meeting. Done.</p> <p>1.10 IS Escalation contact - 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. Alastair had discussed further with Carol Dow (User Support Manager) and agreed that she would email all staff to the effect that she would act as the escalation contact for ISG services, checking that the bottleneck was indeed ISG and not the School and forwarding to Alastair to escalate with ISG where necessary. [ACTION: Alastair]</p>	
2.	<p>Updates from working groups (Paper A)</p> <p>Received from:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teaching admin • Discussion board (Piazza alternatives) • Submission systems • Forum server rooms • Web strategy • Cyber Security 	
3.	<p>Head of Computing update (Paper B)</p> <p>3.1 Eddie/Eleanor GPU refresh - Alastair will request more information from ISG on how the refreshed GPU provision will look. [ACTION: Alastair]</p>	AS
4.	<p>Computing Plan 2022 (updated) and deliverable/risk matrix (Paper C and D)</p> <p>Alastair commented it would be challenging for the School to meet the Computing Plan and that he might have to ask CSG members to consider the relative priorities of the various programmes within the Plan.</p>	
5.	<p>Formalising a policy on decommissioning servers</p> <p>There was a brief discussion on forming a policy on decommissioning servers. Where appropriate, recent academic recruits have been promised</p>	

	time on EIDF rather than new physical servers as part of their start-up package. Where recent academic recruits have already been promised physical servers, these have been prioritised.	
6.	<p>Proposal to increase network segmentation in the School's data network (Paper E)</p> <p>This proposal, to improve the security of the School's computing systems by increasing the level of segmentation in the School's data network, was approved. Alastair will arrange for the proposed changes to be publicised well in advance of implementation to give staff and students opportunity to highlight any difficulties the changes might cause. [ACTION: Alastair]</p>	AS
7.	<p>Proposal to adopt the University Managed Mac service (Paper F)</p> <p>This proposal, to adopt the University Managed Mac service for all new Apple Mac devices, was approved. It was agreed that this service would be mandatory for such devices. Jane asked that a clause be added that highlighted this and states the School's action if individuals object to the policy or remove the technology (JAMF) providing the service. [ACTION: Alastair]</p>	AS
8.	<p>Report from CLISC (Paper G)</p> <p>Petros reported that the most recent CLISC meeting was focused on discussing the College's Computing plan.</p>	
9.	AOCB	
8.	Date of next meeting: 10:30 13th May 2022 (NOTE: changed from 17th May 2022)	