



Computing Strategy Group Minutes

18th July 2022

Present: Jane Hillston, Boris Grot, Joy Candlish, Alastair Scobie, Bjorn Franke, Tim Colles

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 - 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. Jul 22: Meeting held. Joy will ask Janet to submit examples of bids so that we can identify what information is useful. Boris pointed out that the new server room space request form will capture much of the needed information. [ACTION: Joy (to ask Lorna to schedule)]</p> <p>1.2 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 of Finance. Jul 22: this is still sitting with the Director of Finance. Janet and Mark Parsons have been pushing. Costs have been agreed with EPCC. Janet has proposed an interim process, but we need this approved by ERO. [ACTION: ON HOLD (to consider how to create an SRF)]</p> <p>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. Feb 22: Two Informatics researchers are piloting the EIDF facility. Jul 22: Boris and Alastair had recently met with the EPCC team. More technical details have been provided, but progress wrt. commissioning has been slow. Equipment is in place and systems installed, but EPCC still sorting out storage system. They are targetting end August for user access, with perhaps a small number of test users before. [ACTION: Alastair / Boris]</p> <p>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.</p>	<p>JC</p> <p>AS/BG</p>

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 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.

Jul22 – the value engineered option has been funded. Joy is contacting Steven Goodall in Estates to arrange a meeting to discuss next steps.

[ACTION: Joy]

1.3 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.

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. Jul22: Alastair to invite Tony to August meeting.

[ACTION: Alastair]

1.4 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.

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.

JC

AS

	<p>Jul22 – Alastair reported that a few Landonia cluster nodes had been upgraded such that 8 of 48GB A6000 GPUs were now available. Additionally, the School is paying for 8 of 40GB A100 GPUs in the EIDF cluster – how these will be made available is still under discussion with EPCC. [ACTION: Alastair]</p> <p>1.5 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. 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. Jul22: After discussion with IS it is clear a PATH->EUCLID interface is not going to happen. This year ISS are using a local Sharepoint forms-based approach to collect course registrations from students and collate into a spreadsheet they can cross check and then upload to EUCLID.</p> <p>1.6 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. Done.</p> <p>1.7 Eddie/Eleanor GPU refresh – Alastair will request more information from ISG on how the refreshed GPU provision will look. Jul 22 – still awaiting final details, but likely to be similar to existing provision with Singularity. [ACTION: Alastair]</p> <p>1.9 Proposal to increase network segmentation in the School's data network - 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. Jul22 – this is in progress. The self-managed dynamic DHCP wires have been completed. Next step is to tackle the wires hosting the Windows Managed Desktop devices. [ACTION: Alastair]</p> <p>1.10 Proposal to adopt the University Managed Mac service (Paper C) 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. Jul22 – Alastair tabled a revised paper (Paper C). This was accepted.</p>	<p>AS</p> <p>AS</p> <p>AS</p>
<p>2.</p>	<p>Updates from working groups (Paper A)</p> <p>Received from:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teaching admin 	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Submission systems • Forum server rooms • Web strategy • Cyber Security 	
3.	<p>Head of Computing update (Paper B)</p> <p>Both Jane and Boris reported that reliability of the wireless network had deteriorated in recent months. Alastair will ask ask IS to investigate. [ACTION: Alastair]</p>	AS
4.	<p>Theon support for duty allocation, teaching support budget etc.</p> <p>Bjorn described the non linear process involving multiple interdependent spreadsheets that is being used for duty allocation, academic staff load, timetabling and teaching support requests. The current implementation is unwieldy and Bjorn asked that a more sustainable solution be developed. It was agreed that this work needs to be resourced. Joy, Sharon, Bjorn and Tim will have an initial scoping meeting in the next few weeks. [ACTION: Joy (to schedule)]</p>	JC
5.	<p>Clean laptops</p> <p>Alastair reported that the University has introduced a “Clean laptop” service for those individuals travelling to certain high-risk countries on business. The service only provides Windows laptops – MacOS laptops had been considered by IS but discounted as Mac hardware produced from 2018 does not allow disabling of encryption. We will look at producing an equivalent service based on Linux laptops and pre-2018 MacOS laptops. The guidance from ISG will be reviewed and supplemented, where necessary, by School guidance. [ACTION: Alastair]</p>	AS
8.	<p>Report from CLISC</p> <p>None presented.</p>	
9.	<p>AOCB</p> <p>None.</p>	
8.	<p>Date of next meeting: 15:00 24th August 2022</p>	