



Computing Strategy Group Minutes

8th December 2022

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

Apologies:

	Summary	ACTION
1.	Learn Ultra Migration	
	<p>Alex Burford attended the meeting to present paper A “Building resilience and positive choices into our learning technology strategy”.</p> <p>ISG have decided to move from Learn Original to Learn Ultra, with full migration in AY 2023-24. Alex’s paper addressed the implications for the School (significant costs in converting teaching material to Learn Ultra, change fatigue, barrier to keeping our course materials open to the world) and made some proposals that the meeting discussed.</p> <p>The LT team will ask ISG what their plan is for 2 years' time – is it definitely the case that a full procurement will be required at that time, with the risk that Learn Ultra will be replaced at that point? [ACTION : Tim]</p> <p>The LT team and Bjoern will identify some courses to prototype the proposed solution. [ACTION: Tim/Bjoern]</p>	<p>TC</p> <p>TC/BF</p>
2.	PREVIOUS MEETING	
	<p>Approval of previous minutes and matters arising Actions completed from previous meeting were discussed and agreed.</p>	
	<p>1.1 Forum server rooms</p> <p>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 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</p>	

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.

Aug 22 – Estates have been contacted to arrange an initial scoping meeting

Oct 22 – Alastair reported that he had met with Gillian Scott of Estates. Estates are appointing a design consultant to finalise the design, but this has been delayed due to additional workload caused by P&M. A realistic target for commissioning is early summer 2023. Jane suggested that Estates are asked to re-cost the project as estates costs have risen dramatically.

Dec 22 – A design engineer and quantity surveyor have been appointed. Detailed design over December/January. Currently expecting work to be completed around September 2023.

[ACTION: Alastair]

AS

1.2 Informatics use of EIDF

(EIDF topic split off from Forum Server Rooms section)

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 targeting end August for user access, with perhaps a small number of test users before. Aug 22: Target date is now end September. Dec 22: A trial has started involving just one server and two users. The server has been set up with Kubernetes – had been expecting Slurm. There is a training session today (08/12/22) on on-boarding new users – shortly starting a bigger trial with more servers and around 10 users.

[ACTION: Alastair / Boris]

AS/BG

Jane reported that she and Mark had recently discussed the research levy for use of EIDF. EIDF compute will be free at point of use for researchers. However, researchers should cost into their grants wherever possible at a rate of £1500 per research FTE per annum (£7000 for commercial related research). PGRs and CDTs to be charged £750. There will be additional cost if using over 500TB of data storage. This is all subject to the CityDeal board approval (expected 3rd November).

Dec 22 – Jane reported that this topic had not been discussed at the November board meeting. She is expecting it to be discussed at the next meeting in January 2023. Boris expressed his concern that EPCC is not considering the likely up-take of EIDF and will need demand management.

[ACTION: Jane]

JH

<p>Boris proposed a meeting with Kieran Leach of EPCC to flesh out further details of how the EIDF service will be presented to our staff and students. Boris will schedule this. Done.</p>	
<p>1.3 Eddie/Eleanor GPU refresh</p> <p>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. Oct 22 – the refreshed GPU provision will have 6 nodes each with 4 of A100-80GB GPUs in Eddie cluster, and 2 of same nodes in Eleanor cluster. Same Anaconda environment as per existing GPU provision, but Singularity will now be offered, but not yet across multiple nodes. Nodes will have 2TB SSD scratch space, aimed at read-intensive workload – otherwise GPFS for storage. It was suggested that we might be able to use Eddie for taught student requirements – Alastair will confirm whether ISG allow this. [ACTION: Alastair]</p>	AS
<p>1.4 Preparedness for academic year 2022/2023 - discussion</p> <p>Alastair to add a place-marker for the Learn Ultra upgrade to the 2023 computing plan Done.</p>	
<p>1.5 Discussion on research computing with Tony Weir (Director of IT Infrastructure, Information Services Group)</p> <p>Alastair to arrange a meeting between Boris, Alastair, interested academics and members of the ITI Research Services Team to discuss how to increase Informatics use of the Eddie/Eleanor service. Oct 22 – Alastair awaiting a response from David Fergusson (ITI Research Services Team lead) Dec 22- Alastair is trying to arrange a meeting for mid January 2023. [ACTION: Alastair]</p>	AS
<p>Alastair to arrange for our guidance on DataShare to be reviewed and revised where required. [ACTION: Alastair]</p>	AS
<p>1.6 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, Bjoern and Tim will have an initial scoping meeting in the next few weeks. Oct 22 – Bjorn reported that a meeting had been held to work through the existing processes. Tim has been tasked with producing an action plan. [ACTION: Tim]</p>	TC
<p>1.7 Submissions systems working group</p> <p>Bjoern reckoned that the Submissions systems working group work had been overtaken by events. Turnitin and Gradescope are being used for non code submission and Github Campus for code submission. Tim will revise any DPIA(s) that need updated. [ACTION: Tim]</p>	TC

	<p>1.8 Upgrade to Learn Ultra</p> <p>Bjoern reminded the meeting that the upgrade to Learn Ultra is fast approaching. A lot of our teaching pages will need re-written over the next year. We will start work on the material for 1st semester courses during 2nd semester. It was suggested that we look to employ Teaching Assistants to migrate the content, but it was pointed out that we struggle to appoint TAs for tutoring and that should take priority. It was agreed that we should discuss the migration with Alex Burford at the next meeting in December. Boris to invite Alex to next meeting. [ACTION: Boris]</p>	BG
3.	<p>Discussion on Computing Plan for 2023</p> <p>Alastair reported on progress against the 2022 computing plan. Several issues contributed to a lack of progress on several programmes :-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of progress on the Compute, EdLAN and SEP programmes was largely outwith the School's control • The HR feed (WS02) was a substantial, unplanned for, activity • The User Support unit was understaffed, resulting in computing staff in other units, particularly Services unit, having to absorb USU work. • Admin work leading up to the 2022 academic year was significantly more than usual • The development of a replacement LCFG Ubuntu installer proved higher priority than expected. In retrospect it should have been added, mid year, to the 2022 plan. <p>It is clear that more frequent review of progress against the annual plan is required.</p> <p>The 2023 plan was discussed and agreed. Alastair to rename the SEP programme to "People and Money" and delete the Flexible Working programme. [ACTION: Alastair]</p>	AS
4.	<p>Policy discussion on the use of EIDF</p> <p>Joy remarked that at some point portfolio managers will be able to add the EIDF levy to research grants. She asked whether PIs will be able to choose between adding the EIDF levy, or external cloud services or even buying their own servers for hosting in our server rooms – or will portfolio managers rule on this? Boris was worried that EIDF may be swamped given the currently proposed charging model – it is so cheap that perhaps everybody will add the EIDF levy to their grant. Bjoern suggested that we advise people to cost the worst-case scenario – i.e. external cloud services or local server(s) - but that they can switch to funding to EIDF should that prove successful. Alastair/Boris to remind School researchers of the server room policy. [ACTION: Alastair/Boris]</p>	AS/BG
5.	<p>Proposed policy "Removing privileged access from temporarily unused accounts"</p> <p>The proposed policy was discussed. It was suggested that the policy should be at the discretion of the individual's line manager, that an EQIA should be considered and that a definitive list of what is considered "privileged access" should be added. Alastair to revise. Alastair will also check whether the University data security standards address this issue. [ACTION: Alastair]</p>	AS
6.	<p>AOCB</p> <p>None</p>	

7.	Date of next meeting: 14:00-15:30 6th February 2023 Turing Room / Teams	