



Computing Strategy Group Minutes

16th March 2021

Present: Jane Hillston, Boris Grot, Joy Candlish, Alastair Scobie, Bjorn Franke, Ajitha Rajan, 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 - School access to self-managed compute resources - No paper produced yet (will do for next time) but ground work underway. Could use JAF 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. [ACTION: Alastair (to produce paper)]</p> <p>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.</p> <p>Tophat download to EUCLID upload conversion proven to work in principle. Now just needs an easy to use interface for ISS. [ACTION: Tim]</p> <p>1.3 - Providing information on funded research grants to Computing team - Information to computing from Janet's team. Needs further discussion - list of recharge options for example, Jane could send this. Completed.</p> <p>Tim, Joy and Alastair will meet to discuss how we could improve on this. [ACTION: Joy (to ask Lorna to schedule)]</p> <p>1.4 - Server room capacity problems and discussion - Our server rooms, at IF, AT and KB, have reached their cooling capacity limits. We need a long term sustainable plan for managing, and growing, our server room estate capacity. A new working group will be formed to develop such a plan. BG and AS to discuss membership and terms of reference of this group.</p>	<p>AS</p> <p>TC</p> <p>JC</p>

<p>Boris has formed a task force that will meet monthly from January. He has nominations from all research institutes except LFCS. Boris to produce an update at next CSG meeting. Completed.</p> <p>1.5 - Discussion on Terms of Reference and membership of group - There was a brief discussion on membership of the group. It was agreed that we need a proposal to cover both Terms of Reference and membership. Joy, Jane, Boris and Alastair will meet to discuss.</p> <p>Joy circulated a proposal for Terms of Reference and membership - this will be discussed at the next CSG meeting. Completed</p> <p>1.6 - EdLAN replacement - update - The EdLAN replacement has been seriously delayed as a result of COVID. A dedicated meeting will be called to discuss the impact of the EdLAN replacement on the School, once more details are available on what the issues and potential solutions will be.</p> <p>Alastair reported that the School’s connections to EdLAN will be migrated to the new EdLAN distribution routers on 8th June (Appleton Tower and Bayes) and 15th June (Forum). This should have no impact other than some small breaks in service. This will allow us to deploy test “edge” network switches to experiment with. These experiments will inform what changes will be required when the edge migration happens (currently scheduled for w.b. 29th Nov (AT and Bayes) and 7th Feb (Forum). College is pushing hard on ISG to develop the Service Model - this will clarify the IS / School responsibility boundaries. [ACTION: Alastair]</p> <p>1.7 - Report from Compute and Data Strategy group - Alastair and Boris will discuss the results of this group and whether it should continue in its current form and with its current remit. Alastair and Boris had discussed and concluded that we should suspend this group.</p> <p>1.8 - Response to change in Piazza charging model - discussion - Piazza, the discussion board tool used for teaching, has recently moved from a free to a charged model. The cost is not insignificant. As there was no time to deploy an alternative in time for Semester 2, the School has decided to pay for an annual licence. We need to start deliberating on which technology/service we will use for AY 21/22. Bjorn and Tim will form a working group to identify and assess alternatives - to feed back to CSG and Teaching Committee. Mar21: Members have been identified and invited, but the group have not yet met. [ACTION: Bjorn and Tim]</p> <p>1.9 - Progress on Computing plan 2020 - report - The tabled report was briefly discussed. Alastair will update the report to include a link, for each project, to the detailed project information available on the computing projects web-site. Done.</p> <p>1.10 - Draft Computing plan for 2021 - discussion - Several comments had been received prior to the meeting and had been incorporated in the draft plan. The draft plan was discussed.</p> <p>DATAMANAGE - Chris commented that Ajitha, as Deputy DoR, should be involved in this programme. Done.</p>	<p>AS</p> <p>BF/TC</p>
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	<p>PGRDEVICES - the goals should be revised in consultation with Bob Fisher, DoGS. Alastair has provisionally revised the goals, but not yet confirmed with Bob. [ACTION: Alastair]</p> <p>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. [ACTION: Bjoern]</p>	<p>AS</p> <p>BF</p>
2.	<p>Updates from working groups</p> <p>2.1 - 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. [ACTION: Joy / Alastair (to consider how to create an SRF)]</p>	AS/JC
3.	<p>Terms of Reference and membership</p> <p>The tabled paper was discussed. Joy will amend to make it clear that the remit of the group is also to consider external computing services, in particular those provided by ISG. Joy will also amend membership to include Ajitha. [ACTION: Joy]</p>	JC
4.	<p>Sustainable print proposal</p> <p>The tabled proposal was discussed. The proposal was generally viewed as acceptable. However, the specific proposal to remove the A3 printer in the student labs on AT Level 6 was not considered acceptable as this is the only A3 printer available to our students in AT. It had been suggested that we remove one of the ITO A3 printers instead, but this was rejected on the grounds that it would impact negatively on ITO productivity.</p>	
5.	<p>O365 migration MI incident</p> <p>Alastair reported that all accounts had now been corrected. A draft MI review document has been produced by ISG. Alastair will circulate the final document to CSG once it is available. As a result of this incident, additional peer checks have been introduced at various stages of the migration process. Physics have recently experienced a successful migration. Informatics still have 50 accounts to migrate - these are scheduled for w.b. 19th April.</p>	
6.	<p>ISG/Informatics relationship</p> <p>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. [ACTION: Alastair]</p>	AS

7.	<p>HoS meeting with University CIO</p> <p>The following were suggested as issues for Jane to raise with the CIO :-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Piazza - requirement for Piazza or equivalent for teaching • Poor, at best clunky, integration of LT tools - eg. four different video tools • Governance - lack of visibility of ITC and KSC papers and minutes and resulting lack of transparency over decision making process • People and Money - this is not meeting School HR needs despite consultation – ESC similarly. What lessons have the SEP team learnt? • Data centre needs - is ACF our only possibility for expansion? IS/EPCC services do not currently meet the needs of the Machine Learning community. • Plans for hybrid teaching and working - what are the University plans? 	
8.	<p>Report from CLISC</p> <p>Boris reported that the December 2020 CLISC focussed on learning technologies. There was widescale frustration with all the currently deployed LT tools and a view that ISG do not do a particularly good job of supporting LT tools, with no SLAs in place.</p>	
9.	<p>Age of GPUs in taught student cluster</p> <p>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.</p> <p>[ACTION: Alastair]</p>	AS
10.	<p>Date of next meeting</p>	