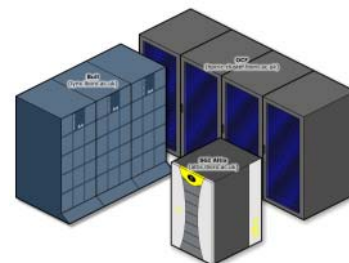


IT Services annual highlights report 2008-2009

1. Research

Support for High Performance Computing (HPC) has been strengthened by a new senior role in IT Services, and an increase in the number of staff dedicated to this area. A University investment of £500K R-CIF funding and £200K recurrent funding via the IT Services budget is being overseen by a stakeholder group of senior academics chaired by Dr Steven Kenny. To this end, a formal tender process for a substantial new HPC system is currently in train. Progress continues to be made on the Linux desktop service, a High Throughput Computing (HTC) Service using Condor, and an on-line set of collaborative research tools. A new on-line system for completing Personal Research Plans (PRPs), linked to other systems such as the publications database to minimise duplication of data entry, is being piloted.



2. Teaching and Learning

The new Learn service was formally launched at the E-Learning 2008 event by PVC (Teaching) Professor Morag Bell, and has successfully come through its first year in full service. IT Services staff working in this area have established an excellent working relationship with the new Head of E-Learning based in the Library, as well as continuing their good relationship with those in CETLs etc. working in this area, ensuring a joined up approach across all academic departments and support services. The creation of a new E-Learning Systems team within IT Services has increased focus in this area. There has been a 27% increase in use of the Optical Mark Reader (OMR) service for University exams – 7% of all exams are now done in this way, equal to 20,000 student assessments, saving 1000s of hours of academic marking time. Use of on-line in-module assessments also rose by 7%, and now features in 127 modules. An on-line pilot of Learn for student feedback questionnaires achieved reasonable success, and will continue into 2009-10, with further strategies being explored for optimising return rates. A new on-line system enabling students to view a progressive transcript of all their module marks has gone live; new results are visible to students as soon as they are approved and available.



3. Enterprise

IT Services was successful in a competitive bid for £180K funding from the East Midlands Metropolitan Area Network (EMMAN) and HEFCE, to establish an EMMAN Shared Information Security Service (ESISS). As well as network security from a technical perspective, this offers an innovative approach to on-line reputational management, taking its appeal beyond the purely technological. ESISS was formally launched on 9 September 2009, and is the first such HEFCE shared service to move beyond the feasibility stage. Initially funded to offer services to all HE and FE in the East Midlands, ESISS has already received significant interest and income from further afield. IT services has secured a further £100K JANET funding in the area of roaming network technologies, where it enjoys an international reputation, and £15K JISC funding for a pilot study into a Customer Relationship Management system for the University.



4. Value for money

Following the dissemination of the findings of the IT Total Cost of Ownership (TCO) study undertaken during summer 2008, work has begun to look at delivering the potential savings identified. A new approach to supplier management for large IT infrastructure seeks to put in place a lead strategic partner to work with us to design, deliver and maintain new installations including servers, storage, data centre and telephony, for the next four years. A new desktop and laptop policy has been agreed by the University, which will reduce costs and improve service to users via shorter break fix times, achieved via greater standardisation, hot spares and engineer on-site. Within all support services, focus is being given to reducing the number of staff who hold two or more desktop/laptop units, and reducing the number of desktop printers, moving print volumes on to Multi Function Devices and the central bulk printing service. Each of these areas has the scope to deliver £100Ks ongoing annual savings, with no impact on research or teaching. Outcomes of this work will be presented to academic departments in due course. In the area of IT service management, a newly-recruited Service Desk Manager and Deputy to lead will lead in improving the 'first time fix rate' of user queries solved immediately.



5. Sustainability

In a significant change to previous practice, student lab PCs are being powered down remotely at night, being revived briefly only when critical security patches must be pushed out. Staff user behaviour is being addressed via the University's 'It's Better Off' campaign, and pop-up prompts to nag the conscience of those who leave PCs switched on overnight. Power consumption and sustainability will be key issues in all forthcoming major IT system procurements and contracts.



6. Conferences and events

IT Services contributed to the organisation of the annual 'MoodleMoot' conference at Loughborough during spring 2009 (Moodle is the system used to deliver Learn). Over 200 delegates from around the world attended, including Moodle creator Martin Dougimas, and representatives of HE, FE and schools sectors. Both the venue and the event were regarded as great successes, so a repeat is planned this year. IT Services also assisted in running the E-Assessment Live one-day event in July, where 100 delegates participated in a number of workshops and hand on sessions, in an area where Loughborough continues to command a national reputation. IT Services colleagues continue to have a high profile as conference speakers, with 16 invited presentations having been given over the last year.



7. Sport

Following on from the successful Real Varsity Match Web broadcast last year, IT Services assisted the Students Union in a high quality video broadcast of the prestigious Loughborough vs. England U20s fixture. As previously, this attracted a worldwide on-line audience, and praise and recognition from broadcast industry figures.



8. Remote working

The University's preparation for swine 'flu has helped growing interest in IT-enabled home working: via the Remote Working Portal and associated services, staff are now able to remotely access all IT systems as if they were at their desk. Improved instructions are available at: www.lboro.ac.uk/it/off-campus.



9. Student experience

IT Services conducted a detailed survey of students to determine user satisfaction and future priorities. In addition to confirming the value of the current HallNet service and network connectivity in hall, this endorsed and shaped our plans to strengthen support arrangements for student-owned hardware, and to further develop print and copy facilities in Halls. New 'virtualised' technology for delivering specialist software in student labs means new packages can be added throughout the academic year; testing is underway on using the same technology to deliver specialist software direct to student-owned machines. Working with a range of other support services, IT Services has led a procurement for a new system delivering digital signage (updated, rolling messages on strategically positioned large screens), which is being installed first in imago halls.



10. Facilities

Though parking is not everyone's favourite topic, IT Services has automated the transfer of data between the car park permit system and the HR system for staff who pay for car parking through their salary, resulting in several weeks effort being saved each year compared to the previous manual entry of this data. The LUSI student records system will be augmented with facilities to track student-owned vehicles. We have been working closely with Facilities Management on the selection of a new access control system (barriers, swipe cards, etc.), with an emphasis on integration with related systems, and the new University card.



11. Telephony changes

To increase the number of telephone extensions available, and pave the way for new phone services to be provided in East Park and elsewhere in the University, all internal extensions have been increased to six digits, becoming the same as the corresponding externally-dialled numbers. An effective publicity campaign for 'Fix on Six', incorporating an eye-catching poster, helped minimise user disruption during this change. A substantial amount of technical planning and work was also instrumental in delivering a smooth change.



12. International support

Following the agreement for Loughborough University to validate degree programmes run by The British University in Egypt, functionality to take data supplied by BUE and produce LU style transcripts for their students has been developed in IT Services. This has involved ongoing liaison with Academic Registry and BUE staff, with the first batch of transcripts due to be delivered early in the coming academic year. Functionality to ensure compliance with the new Points Based Immigration System have been added to the LUSI student record system.



13. Marketing and communications

IT Services has worked closely with Marketing colleagues and other stakeholders around the University in conducting a rigorous tender process to select a new Content Management System (CMS) to increase the impact and facilitate management of the corporate University Web site. At the time of writing this report, a final decision is imminent, and IT Services looks forward to working closely with all other interested parties during the forthcoming year, which will also see the launch of the first staff and student portal systems.



14. Management and Corporate Information Portal

As part of its ongoing development the IT Services CIS Portal, through which such services as the LUSI student record system and the University's Publications system are delivered, has been enhanced in content and style. The style now reflects the new house style in use on the main University and the rest of the IT Services site. It has a much improved modern feel to it and the improvements have been welcomed by staff. A new facility to automate research student fee charging has been implemented, and has improved accuracy and reduced the paperwork.



15. Infrastructure

While this is not the type of work that one can easily do justice to in a report of this nature, it is vital in underpinning the life of the University. Step changes have been made in the last year to our storage arrangements, with data for all our key systems now being mirrored between two main locations, and backup taking place at a third location; a similar configuration has been delivered in our main corporate systems platform. All new systems, including the improved staff email, are following this resilient model. A new Windows domain service has been built alongside the Microsoft Exchange mail platform, and a system configuration and application virtualisation service has been deployed 'in anger' in student IT labs. The Haslegrave generator and uninterruptable power supply have automatically been brought into service during a number of power outages experienced in the building, minimising user disruption.



16. Key performance indicators (KPIs)

User satisfaction gauged via questionnaires and focus groups

UK Student Barometer, Autumn 2008: "Technology" and "Internet access" – ranked 1st out of 24 participating universities; "IT Support" - ranked 2nd out of 24.

International Student Barometer, Autumn 2008: "Technology" – ranked 6th out of 81 international universities, 1st out of 12 participating "1994 group" universities; "Internet access" – ranked 3rd out of 81 international, 1st out of 12 "1994 group"; "IT Support" – ranked 1st out of 81 international, and 1st out of 12 "1994 group"

Service availability metrics:

Regional network and JANET availability – 99.97% (2.6 hours outage)

Loughborough core network availability – 99.96% (3.5 hours outage)

Filestore availability – 99.93% (6 hours outage)

Email availability – 99.86% (12 hours outage)

Service Desk first line fix rate – 5% and rising

Total Cost of Ownership (TCO) of IT compared against relevant benchmarks - £10.8M

IT power consumption – estimated 25% of 'It's Better Off' power savings from desktop IT

Number of departmental small information systems – 2 small systems migrated to LUSI

Degree of recognition as sector leader in key areas of IT specialism:

3 national level publications; 16 national level presentations; £295K consultancy income from HEFCE, JANET, EMMAN and JISC.