Higher Education Information Directors in Scotland (HEIDS)

Approved Minutes

Monday 8th February 2010
Queen Margaret University Edinburgh

Present:

Chair

Alun Hughes	UHI Millennium Institute	AH

Secretary

Kathy McCabe	University of Stirling	KM
David Beards	Scottish Funding Council	DB
Caroline Cochrane	RSAMD	CC
Paul Dean	Edinburgh Napier University	PD
Brian Gilmore	University of Edinburgh	BG
Richard Lynch	The Robert Gordon University, Aberdeen	RL
John Maher	UHI Millennium Institute	JM
Simon Marsden	University of Edinburgh	SM
Stuart McFarlane	Edinburgh College of Art	SMcF
Ronnie McIntyre	SAC Scottish Agricultural College	RM
Tom Mortimer	University of Dundee	TM
Fraser Muir	Queen Margaret University, Edinburgh	FM
Brian Mullins	University of the West of Scotland	BM
Dean Phillips	University of Aberdeen	DP
Fraser Ross	RSAMD	FR
Mark Toole	University of Stirling	MT

1.   Apologies were received from the following:

Malcolm Bain	University of St Andrews	MB
Stuart Brough	University of Strathclyde	SB
Gerry Dougan	SFEU	GD
Paul Haley	University of Aberdeen	PH
Margaret Macleod	Universities Scotland	MM
Andrew McCreath	The Robert Gordon University, Aberdeen	AM
Sean McDonald	Heriot-Watt University	SMcD
Catherine McMillan	University of Strathclyde	CM
Ray Murphy	Glasgow Caledonian University	RM
David Rundell	Heriot-Watt University	DR

Action

The Chair welcomed two new HEIDS members, Dean Phillips from Aberdeen and Richard Lynch from RGU.

2.   Minutes of the previous meeting:
The minutes of the meeting held at the University of Abertay Dundee on 4th September 2009 were approved.

3.   Matters arising:
All matters arising were handled elsewhere in the meeting.

4.   JANET UK catch-up
MT reported that he would be attending a JIR meeting later that week and he would be happy to put HEIDs comments forward.

There were three areas/themes to consider:
1) Regional delivery
2) Procurement (Super JANET 6, MANs)
3) Governance

There was a wide-ranging discussion of the issues, especially the review of regional network delivery. It was noted that there had been an expectation of a further round of meetings between JANET UK and the MANs but this had not happened. The London MAN contract had not been extended. A number of MANs were unhappy with the lack of engagement with JANET UK and there was some discussion about how this could be taken forward to JISC. It was also recognised that there was a conflict of interest for any institution which runs a MAN and that any objections needed to come from client institutions. It was observed that it might be interesting to match institutional responses to geographic area. DP reported that the HEIs in the north east were all on board with the proposed changes and saw it as an opportunity. This led to a lengthy discussion of the implications in terms of cost and of service.

It was agreed that HEIDs was a useful venue to air views and that a collective response would be more powerful than individual responses. There was a specific action on HEIDs to contribute to a discussion on a JANET future SLA, noting that the MANs have historically provided an enhanced service above the standard JANET SLA. BG agreed to convene a small group to put together a list   BG of core elements of a required SLA.

5.   Future JANET meeting
DB noted that there would be a JANET UK new stakeholder liaison meeting in   BG May and asked HEIDs to send a representative. BG volunteered.

6   Shared Services
It was agreed that there had not been much progress with this item but that it was worth trying to re-invigorate our approach. DB noted that the government continued to see this as a highly positive initiative and this was reflected in the policy stream throughout the funding council. SFC would be willing to provide funding to buy time to scope out a project. Such a project could address shared services to meet government expectations of efficiency or could address the greener, healthier agenda. The proposed project would need to be significant in its ambitions, and the involvement of multiple HEIs would be favourably viewed.

It was agreed that it would be helpful to have a greater awareness of plans and ambitions at each HEI in order to be able to identify opportunities for collaborative approaches to various issues. At future meetings, each institution would be allocated two minutes to update the group on current issues with a view to flagging up such opportunities.

A number of existing examples were noted, such as UWS running Dumfries college network; Edinburgh, St Andrews and Abertay running a shared help desk etc.

With further budget pressures on the horizon, MT suggested an exercise to consider collective due diligence to cope with cuts, efficiency gains and shared services. It was agreed that a small group would meet to put together a proposal around this.

AH/MT/FM/ TM

KM and JM agreed to look at a proposal for sharing MIS knowledge and expertise.

KM/JM

7   Cloud computing

PD gave a brief talk on Edinburgh Napier University's experience of introducing outsourced email services to students, having been one of the first three HEIs to embrace this. They had selected Microsoft's product, live@edu. Students had benefited from an increase from 10MB to 10GB of email storage and were very happy with this. Staff still use internal services with its associated space restriction. PD noted that some contractual issues were still being addressed, mainly because cloud computing is not yet well understood by lawyers. ENU's experience is that the student email service is no more reliable than in-house provision, and indeed possibly less so. There have been occasions when changes have been made without warning. PD advised anyone thinking of moving to this to give some serious thought to reasons and risks, especially around disaster recovery arrangements. PD also pointed out that HEIs might find increasing pressure from staff to achieve parity, but that this could introduce potential integration issues with back office systems.

It was agreed that it would be beneficial to share expertise in the criteria to consider when contemplating cloud computing. RGU noted that Disaster Recovery was a key criterion for them.

8   Access to University Systems from NHS sites

HEIDs noted that there continued to be a problem for NHS placement students not being able to access their host institution's resources despite this being protected by secure login. NHS Trusts tend to have highly restricted internet access and therefore block access to external sites and resources. In some cases, 4th and 5th year medical students were provided with NHS accounts but this only addressed a small subset of the student population and did not cover nursing students.

A number of institutions had resolved this by implementing Citrix, but this could be an expensive option. It was considered that JANET Roaming in HEIs might address some of the issues.

It was noted that there is a gateway between JANET and the NHS with strict security policies in place. In the JANET review, it was noted that there were four ways in which universities can connect to NHS systems. However, some HEIs had tried this without success. It seemed that each link between an HEI and the NHS needs to be individually negotiated. It was considered that the general approach and modus operandi needed to be clarified. To that end, it was agreed that Malcolm Teague should be asked for a meeting in Scotland to discuss this. BG volunteered to make this request.

BG

9. Reports

9.1 SFC (DB)

DB reported that there was no news about the forthcoming budget. SFC had now finished its re-structure exercise. There was a new group called Learning, Governance and Sustainability. Brian Baverstock was the new representative on JISC. The SFC Quality, Learning and Teaching Committee had been wound up. Some of the QLTC's business would be dealt with by a new committee for Quality, Equalities and General Purposes; specific skills issues would go to the Skills Committee.

9.2 Universities Scotland (MM)

In the absence of MM there was no report on this item.

9.3 JISC (AH/MT)

It was noted that any unspent or uncommitted capital budget would not now be spent. The impact on the sector in Scotland was two-fold: some of the planned spend had been targeted at projects of national interest; and there would now need to be a review of core funding if this was now expected to cover capital funded items.

The impact on Learning and Teaching was relatively minimal as there was little uncommitted.

There was a discussion about how this might go forward in the future, noting that there was a tension between funding existing services vs funding innovations and that the next round of funding would be even tougher. It was likely therefore that the range of services for review would be wider.

MT noted that JIR had a standing item to review services, especially as new ones come along. Options would be to drop old services or move to a model of full economic costing.

9.4 JCN/JANET UK (AH/MT)
This was handled elsewhere in the meeting

9.5 RSCs (CC)
CC noted that the funding mechanism, now in round four, was under review with a decision expected at the end of March. It was likely that the RSCs would be reduced from two to one, and rebranded under JISC Advance. There would be an open tender for this.

9.6 SCURL/SCONUL (FM)
MT reported that SCURL were working with SCONUL on a feasibility study for a shared service for library systems. A full business case had been submitted to SCONUL for discussion at the end of January. The outcome was not yet known, but if accepted it would be piloted in ten institutions, two of which were Scottish (Stirling and Edinburgh).

MT also noted that there was a proposal from library councils who were funding a report on walk-in services and good practice. This would have IT implications.

9.7 UCISA CISG

In the absence of HFK, there was no report under this item.

9.8 UCISA Executive

TM reported that the last meeting had been rather gloomy, focussing on how to cope with budget cuts.

This led to a very useful round the table discussion about the respective challenges faced at each HEI and how HEIDs members were planning to address them.

This was considered to be a very useful exchange and should remain on future agendas.

10 AOCB

BM reported that he had had a request from Kay Brown of South Lanarkshire Council seeking permission to send out a survey on shared services to HEIDS. This was agreed.

DB noted that there were some vacancies coming up on various JISC   All committees. HEIDS were encouraged to pass suggestions to DB for nomination, if interested.

11 AGM

AH was confirmed as Chair.
FM was appointed as Secretary.
There were no changes to the constitution.

AH thanked KM for her four years service to HEIDs.
KM thanked HEIDS for their support during her time as Secretary and noted that it had been an enjoyable experience.

10 Date and agenda for next meeting

The next meeting would be in late April/May at Aberdeen University.
Agenda items:
Presentation on Heriot-Watt's Oracle BI project – SMcD
JANET UK
Shared services
Experience of shared info centre at Edinburgh/St Andrews/Abertay
Two-minute slot for each institution

AH thanked QMU for hosting the event, providing the catering and facilities and for the tour

2.00 Tour

FM and Steve Watson of QMU gave a tour of the biomass unit which burns local wood to generate energy to run the campus.

K McCabe
10/03/10